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21

Things You Should Give Up To Be Happy

By

Chris D'Cruz & Alvin Huang

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WORLD-CLASS ENDORSEMENTS

"I recently started to read 21 Things To Give Up To Be Happy and loved its simple approach. This book gives you a list of habits to stop and exercises to help you lead a happier life (as the title suggests). I particularly liked that the book was an easy to follow guide filled with stories and examples of life situations in which most of us are likely to face at some point. There is nothing too complicated for the average reader, just sit back with an open mind I'm sure that what is suggested in this book will be of some help to you."

- **Cora Rose , Global Accounts Manager**

" Having recently started a new job, I was initially very conscious of my appearance and how my colleagues would see me. I spent most of my time making others happy but myself. 21 Things To Give Up To Be Happy served as a good reminder that there is no need to be anyone but yourself. This book covers many issues people face that everyone can relate to. I am much more content at work now because of the questions and suggestions this book has come up with. A must read! "

- **Nicholas Goodwin , Product Accounts Architect**

" 21 Things To Give Up To Be Happy provided me with some excellent advice about the things you can do every day to make you happier. The main idea of this book is that there is a better life out there for all of us and there is no reason why we should not be living it. This book takes you through many everyday issues that might be causing us to be less happy than we should be. I would certainly recommend this book, as now I am more familiar with what I need to work on in order to be happy."

- **Monique Tran , International Web Architect**

" I was initially quite taken aback by what this eBook was about. I mean, how do you expect me to give up so many things to achieve happiness? That seemed like a lot to ask of someone. But I gave it a shot and started reading- and it wasn't what I thought! In fact, most of the "things" we are asked to give up are stuff that is negative and clouding our minds with filth that is not needed anyways.

We deserve better in life and I believe that this eBook makes a person re-evaluate their priorities and make informed decisions."

- **Rachael Simpson , International Intranet Supervisor**

" This book encourages you to "give up" certain things to let

happiness into your life. We all behave in certain ways and some of our daily habits might be preventing us from being happy. This eBook came to me at the right point in my life; I was stressed about work and nothing seemed to lift my mood. Thankfully, I was able to use the book's chapter on giving up control and learning to share the workload with my colleagues. It is something I have never done before but thanks to the book's suggestions, I am much more at ease and am enjoying work again."

- ***Forrest Ford , Customer Brand Engineer***

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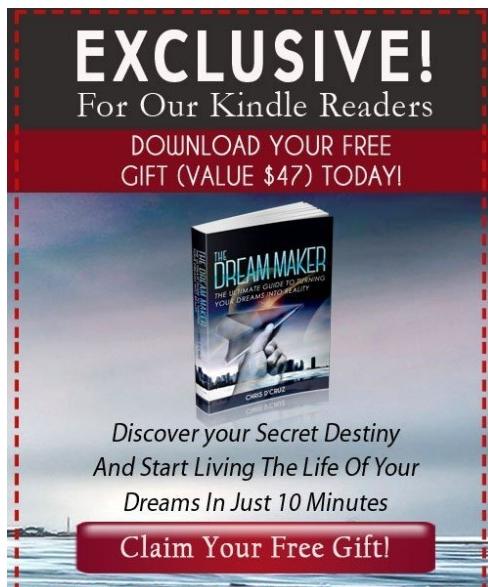
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Chris D'Cruz - is a bestselling author and self improvement coach who has helped thousands of people worldwide achieve their dreams. He believes that it is "Choice, not chance that determines destiny."

Born within a middle-income family, he has struck out on his own and achieved great success in his relationships, career, health and life. His dream is to touch and improve the lives of at least 10 million people worldwide.

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Intro

James Masterson wakes up and goes to work. He is the CEO of a multinational corporation. In the business world, he's an important man. Within himself, he's miserable.

The board of directors no longer allows him to speak during negotiations because of his legendary temper. Due to his lack of control, his company has missed out on several big opportunities and so he has been effectively muzzled.

In his personal life, or what exists of his personal life, James is a very lonely man. He's recognizable, so people often come up to him, but he finds that he can't make positive headway with anyone. Sooner or later, his penetrating unhappiness seeps through and he is left alone again to live on his own.

He used to be married, but he never showed his wife the appreciation that she deserved. Due to his jealousy and his penchant for criticism, the marriage didn't last. He sees his children on the weekends, but they seem ready to go back to their mom's almost as soon as they arrive.

James has become accustomed to loneliness, and doesn't ever seem to get out of the house any more. He's completely stopped exercising, and his diet consists mostly of takeout. The few home cooked meals that he has time to make himself are usually processed and unhealthy. His body is starting to deteriorate, and he's finding it harder to get motivated.

When he's not working, his mind drifts back to the past and how everything should have been so much easier. He thinks to himself, "Things *would* have been so much easier if only my wife had been more understanding of my work. I couldn't spend all of my precious time lavishing her with useless gestures." He finds himself blaming others for a lot of things.

Although the company for which James is the CEO has thousands of employees, he finds himself taking on the tasks of the employees in his immediate area. He's convinced that nothing will go to plan if he doesn't have a hand in it. He's not only more stressed by all of

the extra work, people have to go back over his contributions and fix his errors. He's too proud and too desperate to control everything to admit that he lacks skill in any area.

Although he's considered one of the most powerful men in the business world, his life is on the rocks, he's depressed and ready to give it all up. That's when his one remaining asset intervenes. "I can't do this," he says. "Something has to change."

With that, he begins to take a closer look at his life and begins to see clearly all of the things that he is doing to perpetuate his misery. It's not an easy path, but James takes this challenge head on.

James starts keeping track of what behaviors are useful and what behaviors are causing his problems. From there, he traces those behaviors to the emotions and finally to the original thoughts that caused them. James isn't perfect and so he makes his share of mistakes along the way, but once he takes this inventory of his life, he begins to see the results.

Now, although there are still conflicts, disagreements and the stress of daily activity, James is prepared to face the world with his natural talents uninhibited by his negative thoughts and behaviors. He still struggles from time to time, but overall his life has improved.

Most importantly, for the first time in years, he can say that he's happy.

Give Up Worrying About What People Think Of You

Let's start off with a big one. Being aware of how other people perceive you is an absolute skill. It gives us an insight into our work, our skills and how we can affect change within the environment around us. The problem is, however, that it's far too easy (and unfortunately far too common) to personalize others' opinions of us. This brings us self-doubt and can lead to self-destruction. Along with personalizing what others may (or may not) think of us, we often catastrophize these impressions to a point which can absolutely cripple our ability to be happy.

We've all done it at some point, and many of us do it every day. Putting too much stock in what others think takes us away from our talents and places the weight of the world on our shoulders. How then, can we overcome this destructive thought-pattern, and restore our natural confidence?

Ascertain Your Own Core Beliefs and Values

Often times, what we perceive to be others' impressions not only don't reflect reality, but are irrelevant to our fundamental beliefs. Everyone views the world in their own way. Sure, there are similarities in all of us, but everyone judges through their own set of lenses. An example: Have you ever heard a band come on the radio and you just cannot for the life of you figure out what it is that people like about them? They're awful, yet there are thousands of people who flock to their performances, buy their albums, and generally support everything that they do. We all have our preferences and our beliefs, and it's important to remember that someone's thoughts of you may just be (and usually are) completely irrelevant to you and your beliefs.

How many times have you stopped yourself from doing something that you really wanted to do, not because it would go against your beliefs or values, but because you were worried about what other people may think? That question is, of course, a mere formality, as we have all done this. Whether it's being afraid to go up and sing karaoke, or worrying that your present co-workers would resent

you if you were to move toward a promotion, this oversensitivity to others' views of us can drastically alter our path toward success and happiness.

The first thing that is necessary is to find out what our core beliefs and values are. There are, no doubt, a number of these that you can bring to mind without a second thought, but others may be more difficult to detect. When we are unprepared for a given possibility, we're forced to make a snap judgment. Often times, we fall within our own value structure but, when put on the spot with an unfamiliar situation, it's much easier to make a mistake.

Mistakes are, as we've all heard, learning opportunities. We can take our past mistakes and use them as a stepping stone on our path toward happiness. The problem is that mistakes have consequences. Some of these are minor, but some mistakes can be so devastating that we have to pay for them in one way or another for quite a while, sometimes the rest of our lives.

Here are a few examples of times where our beliefs and our values can come into play:

A co-worker is offered a clandestine opportunity to skim some money from one of the company accounts. The theft will be untraceable, and there will be no risk of getting caught. The co-worker chooses to take the money, and offers you a cut if you help them. What would you do?

A friend's spouse comes over to your house in tears. This person tells you that their marriage is on the rocks, and has been for a long time. You talk for a while, and this person starts coming onto you. This person says that their spouse will never know, they just really need someone to comfort them right now. You have always found this person very attractive, and have entertained fantasies of being with them. What would you do?

A friend of yours is suffering from a drug problem. It's gotten to the point where this addiction has driven away most of this person's friends and family members. Your friend calls you in the middle of the night, pleading for help. He has promised to

quit numerous times, but has always gone back to his drug of choice. You agree to do what you can, but when you share this decision with someone else who knows this person, they tell you not to get involved. They say that if this person is serious, they'll get help on their own. They go on to say that if you help this person, they will no longer respect you. It looks like it may be a permanent choice between friends. What would you do?

This is by no means an exhaustive list, rather just a few illustrations of ethical dilemmas. I'm not going to bother with my personal opinion on any of these, as it is up to you to decide what you believe. The important thing with these brief examples, and the daily influx of other moral quandaries, is to not just take your immediate gut reaction to be the be-all, end-all truth of what you would do in such circumstances. When you're actually put in a difficult situation, you might be surprised. It is imperative to embark on a thorough introspection of your true beliefs. This prepares you, not only for the situations which you've specifically considered, but for other situations which may (and will) arise in your daily life.

How do we avoid the larger mistakes, while continuing to learn from our own imperfections? This question brings us to our first exercise.

Exercise 1:

Make note of situations which you encounter during the course of your day, whether they occur with you personally, or to someone else; and contemplate what you would do in that situation. (It's important to keep an eye on the world around us. It's beyond improbable to turn on the news without finding an example of someone's terrible mistake or destructive belief.)

Make a list in a notebook/journal of your feelings and reactions regarding what you would choose and detail what this says about your beliefs. (For the record, there will be a lot of discussion about the use of a journal throughout this book. I encourage you to start one. It doesn't have to be anything fancy, just something that's easily accessible that you can write in on a daily basis.)

How does this relate to putting less stock in what others think?

By ascertaining your own core beliefs and values, you give yourself license to do what it is that you really want to do, no matter what someone else's opinion may be. Often times, the right decision isn't necessarily a popular one; but by being true to yourself, you not only avoid the guilt and upset that comes from going against your own beliefs, you also take an active step toward enhancing your life in the way that you really want it to be within yourself.

Be Competent in Your Talent or Field of Expertise

Everyone, whether they're a politician, a home-maker, a business executive or a fast-food employee, has their detractors. With politicians, this is incredibly overt and public, but within our own personal lives, we still run across people who think their way is better.

To be competent in one's abilities is to be an authority. Whether we like it or not, we're raised from a very young age to hold those with authority in a higher degree of respect than those without such credentials. If you grew up with siblings, consider the difference between your responses when they told you to do something versus when a parent or guardian told you to do the same thing. It's easy to dismiss a sibling, but when the parental figure tells you the same thing, you're much more likely to comply.

Gaining this competency, and hence the authority attached to it, is actually a lot easier than we often think it to be. There are multitudinous opportunities for those wishing to enhance their skills, whatever they may be in our age of communication. Many websites have sprung up which offer free college courses taught by some of the world's leading professors to an online audience. In addition to this more formal environment there are also scads of how-to videos and websites from authoritative sources; there are books focused on specific fields of knowledge which range from a beginner's level to instruction for the expert.

With the sources mentioned (and myriad more) mediocrity is quickly becoming an outdated mode of existence. We all have our personal limitations, and not everyone is going to be the "World's

“Leading Expert” on something. However, by improving our level of competence in whatever it is that we choose to do, we become much more effective in our jobs, our relationships, and indeed our lives.

Here are a couple of illustrations:

You go to a therapist and during your first session with them, you notice their college diploma. It’s from a respected university, but not only that; affixed to the diploma is the word “valedictorian.” A few sessions later, the therapist moves to another city, but recommends you to one of her colleagues. You go to your first session with this new therapist, and notice that he graduated from the same university, the same year as your first therapist.

Something’s missing though. Although classmates at the same prestigious university, this new therapist doesn’t have an affixed “valedictorian” mark. It’s difficult not to feel like you’ve lost something in the transfer.

This example shows how we may feel about people who are or aren’t experts in their field. What about an example that we may face when our own competence is called into question?

You’ve recently put in for a promotion at work. You have done your job and never missed a day. You have had the opportunity to go to several elective training courses, but have always found a reason to stay home. You frequently ask questions, but have difficulty processing the answers. One of the people vying for the same promotion started the same year as you, but has made a concerted effort to always attend training courses, even when they’re not required. This person takes online college courses regarding areas within their job description and does their own research into the field. Who do you think gets the promotion?

Now let’s see what happens when you do follow through with a path toward increased competence:

You and your spouse used to have constant disagreements and your marriage was heading toward a very unhappy ending. Desperate to change the projected course of your marriage, you and your wife agree to take on relationship building courses, and start to see a

relationship counselor in order to gain the skills to stay together. Through hard work and dedication, you begin to see your own short-comings, and become more effective at lessening their presence and impact. You and your spouse also become more understanding of each other whether times are good or bad. Do you think the marriage is in a better place now?

Exercise 2:

The next time you find yourself letting what someone else may think affect you or dissuade you from something that you really want to do, take a moment and consider these few questions.

- >> Is what I'm doing in line with my beliefs and my values?
- >> Do I have the expertise or knowledge to move forward in an effective way?
- >> Will I be more or less happy by bending to the opinion of this person?
- >> Does it really matter what this person thinks of what I'm doing, or want to do?

Make note of these experiences in your journal and be sure to record your results.

While it's easy and common to put far too much stock in what others may think or say about you, this is a destructive force against personal happiness. Sure, you can't go through life not listening to anyone, but when you latch onto the opinions of others, whether positive or negative, your life becomes one of bending to opinion... whether or not the opinion has any truth, or credibility to it.

How does this relate to putting less stock in what others think?

By becoming competent in your talent or field of expertise, you not only think, but know that what you're doing is important.

Detractors may (and will) come along to tell you otherwise, but if you are competent in your field, you are much more likely to be successful, effective, and most importantly happy. If you know what you're talking about, you'll find that the opinions of others don't

matter nearly as much as they did before. You are fulfilled through your own knowledge and experience. You are an expert.

By giving up caring about what others think of you, you are liberated in a way that is vital to self-esteem, effectiveness, success, and long-term happiness. If what you're doing is in line with your beliefs and values and you have the competence to back up your decision, it really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

Give Up Trying To Please Everyone Else

We've all been there, and most of us are there still: You're scheduled to take a vacation, but your boss wants you to come in to work. You verbally agree with an opinion that is completely opposite of your own. You go to a party, even though you can't stand the host. You give a co-worker several hours of your time, working on their project; and when time comes to present it, they take all of the credit.

When you are trying to please everyone else, you are inescapably disregarding the one person to whom you are most responsible: Yourself. It's one thing to care about others and their feelings; however, it is something completely different to subjugate your wants, needs, time, energy and/or health to please someone else.

Those who would so inconvenience and damage you and your life are those who are least deserving of your efforts. It's important to behave in a professional manner at work, but it's injurious to go against your principles to placate an employer. It's healthy to make an effort to be a better spouse or partner, but it's unhealthy to give up the core of who you are to avoid unrest.

There are things that people have to do in order to be successful, but when these things are detrimental to our lives, they are not only unnecessary, they cause harm. But we want the people that we care about to care about us, like us, love us, want to be around us. How can we give up the need to please others to the detriment of ourselves?

Learn to Say No

For some, this is the most difficult proposition of them all. Many of us are so used to saying yes, regardless its impact, that even considering saying no makes us uncomfortable. We're taught as children not to be a troublemaker, and we're taught by our culture that not always saying yes to a prevailing idea is to be just such a troublemaker. The fact of the matter is that the most influential

people that the world has ever seen have learned the skill of saying no to what they don't want.

Whether the decision is to come in on your day off when you've planned a family outing, or to stand up against tyranny and oppression, knowing when and how to say no is not only a habit of great people but, in many cases, the reason why people are considered to be great. The important thing to know is when and how to say no.

Here are a few things to consider when you are faced with a decision:

- >> If I say yes, will I be violating my own sense of ethics?
- >> Would saying yes be harmful to myself or others?
- >> Will I be able to adequately perform the proposed task?
- >> Do I want to perform the proposed task?
- >> Would saying yes mean that I would be giving up my valuable time, energy, and/or talents without proper reimbursement?
- >> Would saying yes force me to neglect my responsibilities and/or loved ones?
- >> Would I be saying yes just because I'm afraid of saying no?
- >> Is saying yes a step toward accomplishing my goals?

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I'm sure that you can think of dozens of instances in which you have (or should have) said no. The above examples are only intended as a guideline to get us here:

Exercise 3:

- >> Make a list of the times in which you have said yes, but regret it. Example: I was offered a job at half my usual salary and with

twice the workload. Because I was afraid of being without employment, I said yes.

>> Beneath each example, write the effect of this experience, and what you should have done differently. Example: I never have enough money or free time. My workload makes it impossible to do the things that I want to do, even were the money good enough to permit it. I should have turned the job down and held out for a position that recognized, rewarded, and respected my skills and experience.

>> Next, write out specific instances where you have said no when you should have and include the benefits which have come to you as a result. Example: I said no to a job that would have been disrespectful of my talents and expertise in that my work load would have been enormous, and my compensation would have been minimal. Because I held out, I now work in a position that offers me a good salary and enough freedom that I can spend quality time with my loved ones.

>> Finally, write out possible scenarios which may arise for you and decide what the best course of action would be. Example: If my boss asks me to work on the weekend I have set aside for time with my family, I will say no. I may lose the extra hours on my paycheck, but family is more important.

>> Don't stop there though. Write out a few scenarios in which you would say yes. Example: If I'm offered a promotion, I will accept it. It would be a great stride forward in my career path, and the extra money will help my family to have the things that they need.

>> Learning to say no allows you to mold your life in the manner of your own choosing. We all have things that we have to do (e.g. provide for ourselves and our families, bathe, eat, do dishes, etc. ad nauseam,) but when a proposition goes against our ethics, or would detract from our goals, it is not only important, but necessary to say that simple and powerful word, "no."

How does this relate to giving up pleasing everybody?

The connection here is simple. When we say yes when it's against our better judgment, we are doing so for the purpose of pleasing someone else. We are not gaining anything that will truly make our lives better; in fact, we are losing out on the opportunities which would.

Know Your Own Limits

In our PR obsessed world, it is so common to try to present ourselves as being supermen/women in everyday life. We all have our strengths and our weaknesses, and there are different levels to these. For instance, I personally have the skill set required to write a book; however, if you ask me to program a computer game, I'm just going to disappoint you. I don't have that knowledge or those skills.

While it is imperative to constantly strive for knowledge and growth, there are just some things which, while they may be daily work for someone else, would be impossible for us to complete effectively. Given enough time and effort, we can acquire these skills, but it's absolutely fruitless to try to do something that we just don't have the skills for.

Here are a few scenarios:

>> In your job, you are a valued asset for your reliability and skill with working on tax preparation. However, your boss tells you that he would like for you to take your success with preparing taxes to the marketing department. You are absolutely proficient in your current job, but don't know the first thing about marketing or public relations.

>> Your son asks you to build him a treehouse. You want to give your son what he wants, but you have never used a power tool in your life. Agreeing to attempt this on your own will at best end without a treehouse, or at worst lead to an injury either to yourself as you fumble about with the materials and tools of the job, or your son as he climbs into a treehouse which promptly collapses.

It's not always necessary to just say no to a challenge that is outside

of your current skill set. There are other options available, such as:

Ask someone skilled in the area to either perform the task, or help you to learn it yourself.

Take a course in the subject to familiarize yourself with the necessary requirements and day-to-day work involved in the proposed task.

Recommend someone else to take your place, someone with the aptitude to make the proposed task a success.

Just as with saying no, some people will be disappointed that you have declined the work, even though you know that it's something that for which you don't possess the talent. However, if you do take on something that is so far over your head that you wouldn't even know where to start, you will add undue amounts of stress and anxiety to your life. In the end, your limitations will become more apparent than ever.

That being said, if you want to do something but don't yet possess the skills to make a go of it... What are you waiting for? There are multitudinous opportunities to learn whatever you would like to learn, many of which are free. You can't pick up a guitar and instantly be able to play like Hendrix, but with time and practice, you can make a go of it. A person isn't born with the knowledge required to be a rocket scientist, but with dedication and hard work, it's possible.

Not all limitations have to do with possessing or not possessing the necessary skills. Other factors include, but are not limited to: Availability of time, present workload, family responsibilities, and even level of interest. If you are capable of doing something, but have no interest in doing it, you won't be able to continue it for long until you're miserable. Again, as people we have responsibilities that we don't always enjoy, but are necessary to functioning in society and, more importantly, in our lives. However, if, while working at a job that you love, you are offered a position that would pay more money, but doesn't hold any interest for you in the least, it's rarely worth the payoff, and you're likely to be unhappy with the change.

Exercise 4:

- >> Start by writing out your areas of expertise, and the areas in which you need improvement in your day-to-day work/home life.
- >> Make note of time constraints, and other pertinent issues. The next time someone asks you to do something outside of your usual modus operandi, do a quick inventory of the skills required to complete the task, or perform the work in a competent manner.
- >> Ask yourself whether you possess these skills to the level that would be required for a positive result.
- >> From there it's simple: If you have the skills appropriate to the task, the time necessary to give it your attention, and the interest to keep you from being completely miserable, you can say yes with confidence.
- >> If one or more of these areas are lacking, be honest with the person who's asking about why you cannot perform the task in question. There's no need to be rude if you're simply not interested. A simple answer of, "That doesn't seem like something with which I would be effective," is honest (if you bored with/hate the work, you're certainly not going to be nearly as effective with it) and yet avoids insult.

How does this relate to giving up pleasing everyone?

The answer here is quite simple. If you're constantly asking, "How high?" when someone says, "Jump," regardless of your aptitude for whatever it may be, then you're not going to be effective and, chances are, you're going to be miserable. Knowing your own limitations along with learning when and how to say no, streamlines your life into those things for which you are qualified, and have an interest in doing. The most effective people, whatever the area may be, are those who find joy in what they do. These are but a few tools to help you toward that end.

Give Up Taking People For Granted

While it's best not to live a life for other people, genuine, heartfelt appreciation not only makes others feel better, but it makes you feel better as well. Life is a funny thing, and we never know when or how someone is going to leave us. It is therefore important to appreciate the time that we do have with those who are a positive influence in our lives.

Learn to Be Grateful and Practice Gratitude toward Others

Within our lives, there are many people that enrich our happiness, our experience, and indeed our lives. These people can be anything from parents and families, to friends and colleagues, even the clerk at your favorite store who always has a smile on his or her face. Showing genuine appreciation toward those who make your life better is a way to show that you care, and that you don't take for granted their impact.

Think of how much more difficult and stressful your life would be without the people who do things for you. Whether it's a spouse watching the kids while you work, a co-worker giving their insight on a project for work, or the person who sells you groceries, our lives are indelibly linked, and made possible by those around us.

We all need to know that we matter. Have you ever worked so hard for something and been shown little to no appreciation afterward? Whether it's a project for work, a home cooked meal, or a piece of art, we thrive on the appreciation of others. When we work so hard and have little or nothing to show for it, what happens? We're hurt, frustrated, and we're much less enthusiastic about performing such tasks in the future.

Appreciation should not, however, be confused with mere flattery. Flattery is basically just manipulation. What is being suggested here is not mere flattery, but honest appreciation. This appreciation makes both parties feel better, and much more enthusiastic to not only continue working together, but affects our lives at home as

well.

So many arguments within a relationship start with a simple lack of gratitude. It's not necessary to go overboard and bankrupt yourself in order to show appreciation. A simple "Thank you," is a big start. To enhance this, tell the person to whom you are showing gratitude what it was about whatever they did that was outstanding.

Dinner was delicious, thank you. How did you get the meat to stay so tender?

This project is exactly what I'm looking for. Excellent work, I especially like the graphics on the introduction.

Thank you so much for helping me out there. I couldn't have done it without you.

These are but a very few examples of the simple ways that we can show our appreciation to those around us. When we are grateful to others, our relationships are strengthened. When we do not show gratitude, or only do on a very infrequent, limited basis, not only is the other person hurt by our lack of appreciation, but we are as well. Friendships, romantic relationships, and working relationships are but a few of the important facets of our lives that can be strengthened or destroyed by our level of gratitude. Make no mistake, everyone craves appreciation, in fact, I'd go as far as to say that we are sustained by appreciation.

Have you ever worked a job where you were continually pushing your own limits, working hard, long hours, and at the end of the day, week, month, or year, not one person had approached you to let you know that your hard work was valued? It makes work much more difficult to face every day, and is quite possibly the quickest way to kill morale. Have you ever slaved over a hot stove for hours, only for everyone to eat your meal and leave the table without as much as a thank you? This kind of makes you want to just order out in the future.

Exercise 5:

In your journal, write out a list of the people closest to you, your

significant other, friends, family, co-workers, boss, etc.

Next to their name, write all of the things about them for which you are grateful. Leave plenty of space between names, as you may just be surprised at all of the things that other people do for you.

Keep these things in mind, and the next time you see a person on your list, be sure to take them aside, even for just a brief moment and thank them for their positive influence.

Even if it's something as simple as thanking your significant other or roommate for washing the dishes, thank this person for their contribution. You may just find that your interpersonal relationships are strengthened and smoother with this simple act of gratitude.

How does this relate to giving up taking people for granted?

By showing appreciation for those around us, we feel better within ourselves, the other person(s) feel appreciated, and our bonds are strengthened. Whether to your spouse or to tech support, gratitude elevates others around us, and we are enlivened at the recognition of how much people do to make our own lives easier.

Gratitude is the simplest and most powerful way not to take people for granted. We know how it feels when our efforts are passed over; therefore, if we want to see a change, we have to be the change.

Give Up Criticism Of Others

If we spend any time and have any interaction with others, chances are, at some point someone's going to do something that doesn't live up to our standards. People make choices all of the time that we don't agree with, and whether these choices affect us or not, it's easy to find an excuse to criticize those who make mistakes, or fall short of our expectations.

When we criticize though, not only does it not help the situation, it inevitably backfires. Just think of the last time that you criticized, or berated someone for making a mistake. How did they feel afterward? How did you feel? It's true that sometimes there can be a momentary catharsis in "telling someone off," but the truth is that it doesn't fix anything. If it does anything at all, it makes that person less likely to listen to our opinions in the future, and creates a schism in the relationship, whatever it may be.

It's easy to criticize. In fact, our culture often puts undue focus on those who lose their cool, or dole out nasty critiques of the behavior(s) of others. How then, can we overcome this urge to tear down what someone else is doing or has done, and how does this benefit us in our own lives?

Learn the ways of using right language, tone, etc. to give constructive suggestions.

The protest is likely to come to many, if you're not thinking it already that the failure to criticize those who are coming up short would surely lead to a lack of productivity and/or quality in work and everyday life. The fact is that none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes, and I bet if you take even a brief moment, you can think of a dozen times in the recent past where you could have done something different or better. Keeping that in mind, yes, situations do need to be rectified on a frequent, if not daily basis. It's how we go about this communication that can make the difference between overall improvement, or an overall worsening of conditions.

Here are a few scenarios:

An employee is constantly late, and when they do finally show up, it takes them a while before they become productive. When they are working, they do a phenomenal job, but this habit of tardiness is starting to lessen their overall impact as an employee. Something definitely needs to happen, but how can this situation be resolved to mutual benefit?

Some of you may say, “I’d just fire that employee on the spot.” This is certainly an option, but unless you’re Donald Trump, and have thousands of people vying for a position with your company at all times, then maybe it’s not the best solution. Remember, that this is someone who is competent in their work, and when they do finally get going, they make a real difference.

Others may say, “I’d give them an ultimatum: If they don’t start showing up on time immediately, they’re out.” This is a more reasonable option to be sure, but it really ignores the problem. This solution only focuses on the symptoms of the problem.

Still others, quite possibly most of those in this position end up initially confronting the individual with criticism, rather than a solution. It’s understandable. When this person shows up late, it costs your company time and money. It causes you frustration, and the first instinct is usually to vent that frustration on its cause. However, not only does this tactic *not* work, it more often than not leads to the employee’s behavior actually worsening.

Why not try sitting down with that employee and simply saying, “I noticed that you’ve been coming in later. We very much appreciate all of the wonderful work that you do, but I know that you can do better. When you come in late, it seems that you’re not living up to your incredible potential. I consider you a very valuable member of our team, and I would love to see you show that incredible prowess that we’ve seen in the past.” What happens here? The employee is not berated; in fact, he or she is praised and encouraged. “I would love to see you show that incredible prowess that we’ve seen in the past.” It’s a compliment, but it’s also a *constructive* suggestion. It gives the employee a reputation to live up to, and an attainable goal to reach.

Let's try another example:

You have a student who is beginning to fail in your class. When he or she raises their hand, they always have something insightful to say, and it's apparent that they have the aptitude to really excel if they would but apply themselves. How do you help this student reach his or her potential, and encourage him or her to succeed in the future?

Unfortunately (I'd go as far as to say tragically) many teachers would just send a letter home, or chastise the student for turning in sub-par work. Many teachers that I've heard of, and have known personally, would even respond to this scenario by saying, "I'm here to teach to the whole class, I don't get paid enough to give the students each their personal time." Now, granted, with a class full of students, it's impractical and unwise to devote all of your attention to one single student, however, even a brief talk with the student can make an incredible difference.

First off, find something that the student is doing, or has done, particularly well in the class. In this case, when the student raises his or her hand, he or she is sure to have some insight into the classroom discussion. Therefore, I'd suggest leading with this. Talk to the student on their own and tell him or her that you really appreciate all of their wonderful questions and answers during class. Pile on the praise, and get that student excited about that positive trait. From there, something along the lines of, "Well Blair, I've noticed that your grades aren't reflecting your wonderful mind and your insight. What would it take to get that refreshing intellect to translate into your schoolwork?" is a great way to get to the root of the problem.

The student is praised, but the problem is not ignored. Maybe the student has a learning disability such as dyslexia which makes it difficult for him or her to translate their thoughts and knowledge to the page. Perhaps it's simple laziness. Give the student something to work toward. Give them a reputation. Make no mistake: Reputation is something that motivates all of us, no matter what our station in life may be.

What about an example where you're not an authority over the other person?

Your spouse (this is already delicate) has a habit of getting so sucked into their work that they have begun to neglect their usual household chores. You have work of your own, and so it is difficult for you to pick up the slack yourself. Try as you may, things are being neglected and it's beginning to wear on your relationship. How do you approach this without the situation blowing up in your face?

Such things are often the beginning of major conflict within a relationship, and can even snowball into something much bigger. Relationships are built on love, trust, and mutual respect. Therefore, approach the situation with true praise of their abilities. “Carey, I wanted to let you know that the work you are doing is amazing. I don’t know that I understand all of it, but I know for a fact that you must be one of the most valued employees in the company. I understand that this is the cause and effect of your late hours. I want you to know that I appreciate everything that you’re doing. I was just wondering if we could work together to take some of the sting out of the household chores.”

Appreciating their expertise, their hard work, and acknowledging their busy schedule makes the person feel valued and not attacked. Offering your own help also adds to your understanding, and the level of respect shown, as you are by no means intimating that your time is more important than theirs. This creates a common goal for the both of you to work toward. Not only that, it gives your spouse incentive to play a more active role in the household.

In many cases, they may not only be willing to match your level of dedication, but often they will exceed it. Being approached in a respectful and caring manner doesn’t set off defensiveness, rather, it opens that person up to really hear what you have to say, and will grow in them a positive eagerness to uphold their reputation of getting things done.

Remember the importance of honesty in your dealings with people, as individuals are generally far too perceptive to be fooled by mere flattery. In fact, flattery has a tendency to put a person immediately

on guard, as they ask themselves, “What does this person want from me?” Praise should be something from the heart, not a tool of falsity and manipulation. When a person receives this sort of recognition, their self-esteem grows, and they become eager within themselves to live up to their reputation.

Exercise 6:

The next time you are tempted to throw ruthless criticism at another, take your feelings of frustration or disappointment and put them into a letter.

Within this letter, write all of your complaints, your criticisms, and your frustration.

DO NOT SEND THIS LETTER!

After you’ve finished writing out your irritation, put this letter in a sealed envelope, and in a desk drawer. Another alternative is that you can place this envelope into your journal.

Give it a couple of days, and when you’ve had a chance to effectively cool down, talk to the person with praise, encouragement, and respect.

Share your wish for them to live up to their own reputation, and finish your part of the conversation by asking if there is anything that you can do to help them achieve their new goal.

As for the letter, once you have had a chance to speak with this person in a positive, encouraging way, take the letter and destroy it. That letter has served its purpose by allowing you to vent your frustrations in a way where no one got hurt.

When the individual makes an improvement, give praise, and show them your appreciation. This will help them not only get motivated, but stay motivated.

How does this apply to giving up criticism of others?

Using the right language, tone, and a high level of respect gives you a way to rectify problems which are affecting you, your household, or your company in a manner that is beneficial, not only to you, but

to the person with whom you are speaking. When you confront someone with blatant criticism, they are more than likely just going to shut off and come back to you defensively and the problem doesn't just stay the same, it has a tendency to get worse.

By being honest and respectful to someone with whom there is an issue, you give that person a sense of gratitude and of enthusiasm toward their work or their home life. You not only make the situation better for yourself, you make the situation better for them, and this will end up in greater productivity, better work or personal relationships, and will be a benefit to you and to others for a long time to come.

Learn to Praise Others

This concept was touched upon in the previous section, but not enough can be said about the value of giving honest praise to people. We don't have to look beyond our own lives to recount the effects of praise as opposed to condemnation. When we are learning something, we are in a very fragile state. Whether it's learning to play an instrument, do calculus, or be more productive, the words of others can have a startling impact.

Think back to a time that you had when you were trying something new, or developing an old skill or talent further. How did you feel when someone praised you for your efforts? How did this affect your motivation to learn more? Now think back to a time where you were neglected or criticized due to your early stage of development in one area. Did you still feel motivated? There are a few of us who can turn that criticism into fuel, but every one of us are affected in a negative way by criticism, especially when it comes while learning or developing a skill or talent.

Why do we give praise? Well, if knowing how wonderful it feels isn't enough to satisfy this question, consider this: Praise not only makes us feel good, but it makes us want to do better. When we're praised, we come to crave that feeling. Praise is appreciation, it is respect, and it is recognition. Praise is even more than that; it's a way to confirm within ourselves that we are doing something that is worthwhile.

In today's world, it's easy to feel passed by and underappreciated. Many people go through their whole lives without receiving adequate praise for their accomplishments, and just think how much more we all could do if we were levied this simple respect.

Praise is not manipulation or cheap flattery, it is the lifeblood of our efforts. Don't believe me?

Here are a few simple examples:

A dancer has trained for years to master her craft. She performs before a sell-out audience and, to her mind, she is doing beautifully. Upon completing the difficult choreography, she takes a deep breath, but no one applauds. She immediately thinks back through her steps and calls to mind every minute nuance of her performance, and even in the sections where she thought she did especially brilliantly, she finds fault. Whether the fault actually existed or not, the lack of praise leads her to believe that she has failed not only her audience, but herself. No matter how prodigious her routine actually was, in her mind, it will remain the pinnacle of failure. She will certainly think twice before accepting another chance to perform.

A significant other works from home. Their hours are long, but they make every effort to support you in whatever way they can. They attend doctor's appointments with you, they take time to review your work when you bring it to them, and along with paying their share of the bills, they also make an effort to fulfill their daily chores to the best of their ability.

When the two of you get into a disagreement about something, as happens in even the best, most understanding relationships, you mention, in the heat of the moment, that they don't pull their weight. You tell them that while they spend hours on their work, everything else is neglected, and you tell them that even the things they do for the household are far from enough. You know and they know how much they actually contribute, but by degrading their efforts, they receive only a feeling of worthlessness and contempt. Not only is the person's motivation and self-worth damaged, but the relationship itself is damaged too.

These are only a couple of scenarios which go in a negative, unhelpful direction by showing a fundamental lack of praise. In order to further illustrate the principle of praise, let's take a look at a famous story.

Ludwig van Beethoven was a master of music. Despite being deaf, he created some of the most timeless and incredible music that the world has ever seen. When he got up to conduct the premiere of his ninth symphony, he put all of himself into it. Because Beethoven was completely deaf by this point, he was joined by Michael Umlauf, who was the official conductor. Beethoven kept the tempo.

Although he couldn't hear a single bit of the masterpiece as it was performed, the orchestra reported that they followed Beethoven's tempo exclusively. When the piece ended, Beethoven continued to give the tempo as he could not hear the music cease, or the thunder behind him. A singer, as the story goes, came up to the maestro and turned him around. Although he could not hear it, he must have felt the praise from the audience. Those who were in attendance were on their feet, cheering and clapping their hands. It's reported that the audience threw their hats in the air, held their hands high as they applauded, and did everything they could to show the composer his due appreciation.

Imagine how it would feel to have the pinnacle of your life's work met with only silence and neglect. This is so obvious that it doesn't take much imagination at all; however, we constantly ignore those who are close to us, or do things which make our lives easier. We withhold praise, not only for malicious reasons, but more often because we are so used to taking things for granted that we neglect to give the praise which is such a benefit to all involved.

Whether Beethoven had somehow lost his place, or continued to tap out the tempo out of despair from thinking that his greatest work had gone unappreciated, think of what a profound effect this would have had on the composer. Had he turned around to a stoic, motionless audience, there's no doubt that he would have been crushed.

We're not all Beethovens, and most of us aren't going to reach such

unimaginable pinnacles as he, however, we all need praise. We tend to react in a way that is consistent with the feedback that we receive. If we're trying hard at something new, but all that we get is negativity, we're much less likely to continue on with it. Criticism influences us to stop trying, however praise will encourage us to not just keep up what we're doing, but strive to be better.

Exercise 7:

In addition to the work that you've done in exercise 6, pay attention to the advances of someone you see on a regular basis.

When you notice that this person has improved in some way, no matter how small, be the first to praise them for their efforts. Let them know that you recognize their achievement, and that you support them.

Make note of the results of this in your journal and watch as not only the other person improves, but you do as well.

How does this apply to giving up criticism of others?

As with anything, when something is removed, it should be replaced with something else. Why not replace it with something better, more effective, and more life-affirming than trenchant criticism? By giving praise sincerely, you give another person encouragement to move forward and you may just find yourself taking greater strides as you do.

Criticism has a way of backfiring, but with these simple suggestions, you can find a gentler and much more effective way of helping a person to improve themselves and their behavior.

Thoughts are the origin of all emotion and behavior. In fact, there is a direct cause and effect. Thoughts which are positive lead to positive emotions. Those positive emotions drive a positive behavior. The same is also true. Therefore, to criticize, to lack appreciation, and to deny praise to someone is to not only sidestep progress, but actually reinforce their mistakes.

Give Up Gossiping

Gossiping is one of the most destructive things that we can do, not only to the target of our gossip, but to ourselves as well. When we gossip, we deny a person's right to stand up for themselves, and we overlook our own reasoning. There are those who will gossip about anyone anywhere at any time about anything, but most of us aren't so wrapped up in the addiction of gossiping. Or are we?

When we hear a juicy bit of news, whether it's factual or false, being social creatures, we have the urge to share this information... especially when it concerns someone that we don't like. How then can we overcome this distracting, detrimental, and destructive force?

Evaluate and find out the root of the problem. Why are you so against the person?

Gossip often, if not always, strikes our fancy when we believe another person to be making a mistake. With those who we dislike, or are prejudiced against, these mistakes can be trivial, or not actually a mistake at all. It's when we levy this judgment without knowing or caring about the facts, we degrade ourselves to the level of a schoolyard bully.

Gossip, even when we do know all of the facts, accomplishes nothing except cause damage to others and to ourselves. Gossip takes us away from our own lives, our own issues, and our own room for improvement, and causes us to focus on another's perceived shortcomings. This divergence in focus takes away our ability to be productive, and is in opposition to a life of happiness.

When we find ourselves paying a great deal of negative attention toward someone else, it's important to find out exactly why it is that we are so disposed against them. Has this person done something that has caused you to dislike or even hate them? Does the person have some skill, quality, relationship, or possession that you covet? Does this person live a lifestyle that you don't agree with or understand? Just what is it about this person that has you

ready to repeat or create rumors or gossip about them?

Although sometimes the answers to these questions are clear and quickly come to mind, sometimes we just find them to be ripe for the rumor mill. The fact of the matter is though, that there is always something behind this willingness to gossip about someone else. Perhaps this person belongs to a group that believes or behaves differently than you do, and this lack of understanding leads you to resentment.

Whatever the reason is, it's necessary to find the root cause. Gossip lowers everyone involved, most of all, the person spreading it. Everyone has entertained gossip to some degree, and there is never a positive purpose to gossip; but when gossip reaches the level of obsession, we may find ourselves not only spending undue amounts of time spreading stories about another, but losing friends.

Even when we do find gossip entertaining or cathartic, when we're around someone whose sole purpose seems to be maligning other people, the novelty wears off remarkably fast. People enjoy being around others who uplift and enhance their own lives. The gossiper has little to offer others outside of their gossip.

But it can be so fascinating to hear stories about someone else. It can take your mind off of your own shortcomings and put your frustration onto another person. Someone else is doing something that is really bothersome, and therefore they deserve to be levied a measure of derision. While these are a few of the common causes for initiating or perpetuating gossip, they have one thing in common. They cause you to ignore your own life and your own problems. This cannot be overstated.

How do we get past this?

Exercise 8:

When you find yourself either participating in, or feeling the urge to participate in gossip, take a few minutes and write down your feelings about the person in question.

Take an inventory of their attributes and what you may or may

not like about them.

Pay close attention to what comes to your mind the most when you think about this person, and be sure to make note of it in your journal.

Next, write this question: “What do I have to gain by gossiping about this person?”

Write out all the negatives and the positives (if there are any) that will come from this act, and before you allow yourself to engage in gossip.

Take a day or two and reflect upon what you’ve written.

Add more items to the list if any cross your mind and, if others are engaging in gossip about this person, make note of what it is really accomplishing.

How does this apply to giving up gossip?

By finding out what it is about the person(s) in question that really bothers you, you may discover a common thread. Gossip is always more about the individual perpetuating it than it is about the person who is the target of it. What your feelings about this person are says a lot about you and what it is that puts you in mind to gossip.

If you find yourself irritated by their success, chances are that you’re feeling unfulfilled in your own life. If you find that the problem is their beliefs, religion, race, or sex, you could benefit from opening your mind to other ways of being other than your own. There’s no need to give up your core beliefs, but if you find yourself intolerant and willing to malign another based on their differences from you, chances are that what you’re truly feeling is insecurity within yourself. If you cannot find a deeper reason than you enjoy gossiping about other people, you may just find that you’re doing it as a way to fill a hole inside of yourself.

It’s so easy to berate someone that you know (or don’t know) rather than focus on your own issues; but rather than cast your stones at another, take a look at yourself and think about how you would feel

if someone started spreading rumors or gossip about you. By giving up gossip, you relinquish a hurtful, damaging, and ignorant habit. By discovering what gives you the urge to gossip, you learn something very important about yourself. Whatever the reason may be, you can come to the root of the problem and work toward filling that space that gossip had chewed out inside of you. You can then replace that emptiness with something worthwhile and fulfilling.

Give Up Control

Without a doubt, some of the most stressed and unhappy people that I've come across in my life have been people who find it difficult or impossible to give up control. Whether you're a business owner, an employee, a stay-at-home mom or dad, or a student, it's important to learn your own limits. This principle was brought up in an earlier chapter, but in regard to the aspect of control, it takes on a new form.

Whether you're finding yourself exhausted from not allowing others to do their part, or stressed from always needing to know that everything is going just the way that you want it, giving up control is one of the fundamental keys to true and lasting happiness.

There are those who suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and do not have a choice in the matter. For those people, long-term therapy, often with the right medication can alleviate this malady. This book is by no means intended to diagnose, treat, or cure physical or mental illness. Only a doctor can help you determine the best course of treatment. However, if you do fall into this category, you may find some helpful suggestions within these pages as well.

Learn How to Trust Others and Delegate Tasks/Projects to Them

For someone who's used to being in control, this is a difficult proposition. The age old adage, "When you want something done right, you have to do it yourself," is a mantra for many people. Unfortunately (or fortunately,) we can't do everything ourselves. There are many things that are simply out of our control. It is how we deal with these things, however, that can make the difference between a happy life and one filled with stress and anxiety.

The greatest things that the inhabitants of the world have accomplished have been collaborative efforts. From the rockets which send us into space, to the technology that makes our lives

easier with each passing year, teamwork is what keeps new ideas flowing and gets the work done.

If you're an employer, you hired your employees for a purpose. Whether you just don't have enough hours in the day, or whether you're involved in a business that has aspects with which you are not an expert, your employees serve a vital purpose to you and your company. Delegation isn't only a convenience, it's a necessity.

If you're not an employer, you can still gain as much from learning to delegate. If you work a full-time job, it becomes incredibly stressful to take care of all of the things outside of work that go into making a life for yourself. Whether you live alone or with other people, you are constantly delegating aspects of your life... even if you'd rather not admit it.

When you take your car in for maintenance or repair, you are delegating that job to the mechanics that specialize in working on cars. When you go to a restaurant, you are delegating the preparation of a meal to people who work in the kitchen. When you go to the doctor, you are delegating the job of ascertaining your level of health or illness, and the treatment of your body.

Why then is it so difficult to delegate things to others within the context of work or home life?

While there are many answers to this question, I've found that there are a few which tend to be more common than others. Some people feel that if they're not the ones doing something then it will have to be redone anyway. Others believe that they are the only ones who truly understand, or truly care about what needs to be done and that their vision cannot be fulfilled by anyone else. Still others are under the impression that delegation is a sign of weakness.

There are many other personal reasons that people have for refusing to delegate, but what are some solutions? How can we become more comfortable with, and more proficient in delegating tasks to the appropriate agent?

First of all, it's important to realize that you can't be everywhere at

once. You can't do everything all of the time. It's a simple matter of physics. There's not enough time in the day to perform every task at home and in the entire workplace on your own. Multinational corporations aren't made up of one extremely busy person; they are filled with many people who specialize in their particular job. Even small businesses have their share of needs which cannot be filled by the efforts of one person alone.

For those of you who are business owners or managers, let me restate the following: Your employees/team-members are there for a reason. Would you have hired someone even though they were not right for the job? If someone slithered in through the cracks, and it becomes plain that they're not going to be able to fulfill their responsibilities, would you keep them on indefinitely? If you're a manager and someone is clearly not pulling their weight, and has ignored coaching to help them improve, do you just take on their workload? In order to keep a business running, the answer to the above questions *must* be, "No."

Here are a few tips to help you build your own level of trust in your employees or team members:

Observe your employees or co-workers and ascertain their levels and areas of expertise.

When a person does a particularly good job, show them praise, and make note of their achievements.

Think for a moment what would really happen if you were to take on everyone else's job on top of your own.

If you need to, separate yourself as much as possible from a specific project.

Talk to the employees and get to know more about them and what it is that they do.

Thus far, this section has been largely focused on business owners and management. What can we do in our homes to make our lives run more smoothly?

Make a note of all of the successful contributions that others have made (whether they live with you or not) to make life as you know it not only possible, but smoother and more pleasant.

Realize that you are not the only person in the world who likes things their way. The fact is that everyone does.

Make a list of all of the things that you have delegated to others and focus on how this has made your life simpler.

If you're overbearing, your employees, your co-workers, your significant other, your friends, your family, and everyone else who traipses through your life will come into conflict with you at one time or another. Delegation isn't only about trust, it's about respect. Telling someone that they can't do something up to your standards is telling them that you are better than they are. Yes, we all have areas of expertise, but none of us are inherently masters of everything.

For one final example, consider this: When you're driving down the road, you are delegating to others the responsibility of not running into you. You have a measure of control over your own vehicle, however, if someone doesn't behave in a safe, responsible way, chances are, all of the control you possess won't change the fact that you just got hit by a careless driver. The reason that we don't get into a wreck every time we leave the house, whether we are aware of it or not, is because those who are on the road around us are worthy of a certain level of trust. We trust that they will drive safely enough to not involve us in an accident.

Exercise 9:

In your journal, keep track of every time you feel the need to take over the helm at work or at home.

Write out the reason that you felt another person couldn't be trusted to complete the task on their own (i.e. general lack of trust, lack of confidence in the other person's ability, need to be the one in the spotlight, irritation that someone approached the project in a way different from your own, etc.)

After that, make an honest note about whether these concerns are rational or irrational. An example of a rational reason to jump in is when someone asked for help, expressed inability or lack of necessary skill to effectively complete the project on their own, isn't showing any objective initiative, etc. Irrational reasons include: They just won't do it right, they're not doing it my way; I'm the only one who knows how to do it the right way, etc. ad nauseam.

Keep a running tally, and the next time you run across such a situation, ask yourself, "Is there someone other than me that can realistically perform this task?"

Be honest with yourself, appreciative of those around you and you'll find, more often than not, that there is a lot that you can delegate to others.

How does this apply to giving up control?

By learning to delegate, you are learning to trust others and let yourself off the hook. You give others the opportunity to teach you new ways of completing projects, and you'll learn how much easier your life is by sharing the responsibility for a given task. You may even find that your overall ability to trust in others is increased by this simple, yet effective action.

Learn How to Train and Mentor Others so You Can Take a Backseat

If you have an area (or areas) of expertise, then you may feel the need to jump in whenever a task or project arises within this field. At times, you may be alone in this knowledge in a given workplace. Rather than insisting that you stay the king or queen of the castle in this area (and inevitably run yourself ragged) it's infinitely more helpful to you and to others to share this knowledge so that you aren't the only one who can adequately perform a given task.

Training is one of the most effective ways that we learn. Whether the training is on the job, in the classroom, through simple instruction, or experience, new or enhanced knowledge leads to an overall betterment at work and at home.

When you have a particular skill, share it with those around you. Taking the time to train or mentor another pays off in dividends, not only in time, but productivity as well. Mentoring is often the easiest way for someone who prefers to be in control to ease into trusting others. Through this process, you are sharing your knowledge and experience in a more long-term, collaborative setting.

Exercise 10:

Observe the tasks in which you spend the greatest amount of time and energy.

Make an objective assessment of the skills of those who work with you and around you.

Upon finding someone who seems to have an aptitude or a genuine interest in the particular task, approach them about additional training and responsibility.

If/when they accept, set up a schedule for the two (or more) of you to meet, whether it's formally or informally to go over the basics.

Once the basics are covered, move on to more advanced techniques, including specific examples of the type of work done in this area.

Consistently ask them if they have any questions, or insights into how the work can be done more efficiently.

Give them a couple of test projects to ascertain their new aptitude and adjust your training accordingly.

Let them know that if they have any questions as they begin their new task that you or another qualified delegate will be able to give them assistance.

Understand that knowledge acquisition takes time, but that even if they're working at 25% your usual rate, that's still 25% that is off of your plate.

Continue to give guidance as required.

By opening yourself up to instructing others, you not only share your knowledge and gain a more experienced employee, you solidify and enhance your own knowledge of the field. By delegating your responsibilities to adequately trained individuals, you can take a step back and focus more on work that may have been neglected due to your preoccupation with the previous task.

One of the wonderful things about people is that people simply love to learn. We all have our specific areas of interest, but if you offer training, mentoring, and incentives, you may be surprised at how many people are happy to share your burden. By training others to handle some of your day-to-day duties, you have more time, less stress, and an overall better place from which to move forward.

Exercise 10 (alt. cont'd)

Take an inventory of your daily tasks in the workplace.

Write down corresponding deadlines, and the projected amount of time for each task to be completed.

Make note of the skills of your co-workers, and match that up with the individual tasks.

Discuss a particular project with a co-worker/employee who shows proficiency in the area of a given task.

Work together to make a plan for delegation of that task.

(Most importantly) Once they start, think of it as their project, not yours. It's not your job to do someone else's work, and that applies just as much here.

How does this apply to giving up control?

By learning to delegate, you are learning that you have limitations, and other people have skills. A person who has to control everything may become successful for a short while, but this is an unsustainable way to live and work. Even Orson Welles, one of the screen's greatest actors, and an infamous control freak, found his career spinning out of control when he refused to let others do their

own parts on their own.

When you mentor or train another person, this can help be a buffer to a life of better synergy and a better overall result. A film doesn't go without being edited by a professional editor; why then would you refuse a second (or third, or fourth, etc.) set of eyes or hands on your next project?

Give Up Destructive Anger

Anger is a very common emotion, and a very necessary one. Without anger, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to have survived as a species. For this purpose, this chapter isn't simply "Give up Anger." It's when anger is frequent and/or escalates out of control with little to no real or compelling provocation, at best it becomes a source of stress and anxiety that not only can, but does shorten lives. At worst, it creates some of the worst situations possible.

Anger is something with which we have all had experience. Whether ours is a short fuse, or we know someone whose is, anger has a funny way of taking over our minds and blotting out our rationality. There are those for whom anger management courses are necessary, but everyone can benefit from familiarizing themselves with some of the following techniques.

Explore the Different Techniques of Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness

While mindfulness and meditation work hand-in-hand, it is pertinent here to differentiate between them.

Mindfulness can be broken down to awareness of ourselves and awareness of other people and their feelings. In the world we live in, it's becoming more and more fashionable to disregard others, and the consequences of this shortsightedness can be seen almost anywhere in everyday life. We're often encouraged to be solipsistic, that is, to act or believe that there is nothing outside of ourselves and the things which directly affect us to which we need pay any mind. The hypocrisy in this philosophy is blatant given even a moment's thought. If we want to be treated a certain way in order to make our lives easier, more peaceful, and more pleasant all-around, then it is incumbent upon us to give the same consideration to others. The alternative is a world (not unlike the one in which we

often find ourselves) where everyone is treated disrespectfully because not one person has any concern for another.

The lack of mindfulness inevitably backfires and makes our lives infinitely more difficult than it needs to be. Sure, sometimes others are not living up to our expectations, or may even be deliberately rude or destructive to us. These are certainly situations in which it is not our own fault that someone else has chosen to be an idiot; however, we have the choice whether or not to join them in their idiocy.

Human beings are symbiotic creatures. We depend on each other for the continuation of society and, indeed, our very lives. When we run across a difficult situation or a different person, it's easy to allow one's temper to start playing the game of one-upsmanship. How many times in your experience has the escalation of a negative situation been helpful? Can you think of a single situation that has been solved, or even made better by one or more people losing their temper?

If you can, science would love to know about it.

The fact of the matter is that losing one's temper causes one to lose control, not only of one's self, but of the situation. This is when situations can go from mildly annoying to downright explosive. Not everyone is going to end up the perpetrator of some insane act that ends up on the local news, but our lives are certainly affected negatively by not being mindful of others and/or ourselves.

Along with helping to prevent a situation from spiraling out of control, being mindful just makes life easier and better for all of us. Awareness puts the responsibility in our hands. We're all responsible for our actions but, by being aware, we can mold the situation with all of our natural control intact. This gives us influence over what it is for which we will be responsible. Life is a lot easier when it's not necessary to constantly apologize for one's actions.

Exercise 11:

Take your journal or a small notepad with you for one full day everywhere you go.

On the paper, make a list of different emotional reactions that you have whether positive or negative throughout the day.

Be sure to leave at least a brief note explaining what the situation was. It can even be a few words, such as “flat tire: frustration, anger.”

Along with the list of emotions and their external link, make note of two more things: the thought processes that went into two or three of the stronger reactions; and also, a running tally of the number of times that you have found the need to apologize for something that could have been prevented had you reacted differently.

At the end of the day, put the notepad or journal in a drawer, or somewhere out of sight.

Don’t look at the notepad for two days.

On the third day, open the notepad and review what situations arose and what your first inclination was.

Make note of any patterns that emerge, such as being easily frustrated or upset by small things, etc.

Update the list with any situations for which you later apologized regarding your actions or responses that day.

Over the rest of this week, feel free to review these things and see if you can pinpoint which situations tend to lead toward a negative reaction.

At the beginning of the next week repeat this process, starting with taking some paper and making a note of irritants and emotional reactions.

When this process has been repeated, you should already have begun to be more aware of your thoughts, emotions and reactions. Use this increased awareness as a springboard toward developing mindfulness of yourself.

When something starts to get you angry, frustrated, or upset, take a deep breath and allow yourself to think through the

situation before reacting to it.

Allow yourself the time and the clarity to remember situations in which you have had a similar reaction and how these situations turned out in response to your actions.

By working with self-awareness, we are taking a positive responsibility for our thoughts, our emotions, and our actions. The above exercise and the thoughts contained within this section are not meant to imply that this is something which is easy or doesn't require maintenance; however, with mindfulness of how our reactions affect ourselves and others, we open up a whole world of choices. We could certainly choose to continue to enslave ourselves to emotion or negative thought processes, but why?

There is a cause and effect to everything. Not only that, each effect creates a new cause. The choice is up to you if an effect ruins your day, or provides you an opportunity to rise above a stressful situation.

How does this apply to giving up destructive anger?

The first step in giving up anger is to understand it within ourselves. What is it that makes us angry? What is it about other people's actions that push us to lose our temper (and thus our self-control)? It's with the combination of self-awareness and the willingness to overcome our own proclivities toward destructive anger that real change can be made.

It's not healthy to suppress emotions; however, by delaying the reaction to a given frustration can give us a chance to release our anger in a positive way. Anger is a natural part of our makeup, but with awareness, we can channel it into something healthy and useful, rather than something destructive and damaging. This is where meditation comes in.

Meditation

Mindfulness is certainly an important and necessary tool that can be used to understand the root causes of what makes us angry, but what can we do to make ourselves less prone to destructive anger?

By entering and encouraging a natural state of calm and serenity, this goal becomes much more achievable.

Meditation often conjures up the image of a monastic lifestyle, but in reality, meditation is something which is natural to human beings. In fact, we experience trance states on a daily basis. Have you ever found yourself daydreaming at work or in school to the point where, when you come out of it, you find that you've missed a large portion of what has been said? This is an example of a trance state. Even though you haven't left the room, plugged your ears, or done anything other than daydream which might otherwise prevent you from being aware of your surroundings, you may as well have been somewhere else entirely.

This is an example of what I like to call a passive trance: One where you may or may not be intentionally removing your attention from your immediate surroundings, however, you are certainly in a trance state. While this in and of itself can help to relieve a bit of stress, it can also cause more stress if you've missed something important.

What I personally refer to as an active trance is one that is done on your own time, in your own way and for a specific purpose other than a simple escape. By utilizing meditation, you allow your mind and your body to relieve itself of stress.

Meditation and relaxation have been shown to extend life, improve focus and lower the amount of destructive anger which can wreak such havoc on every part of our existence. These benefits not only affect us directly and immediately, but they have an effect on those around us as well. When we're calmer and more balanced, our interactions with others are smoother which in turn reduces the amount of stress, not only to those around us, but toward ourselves as well. Therefore, the benefits of meditation are truly exponential.

It's not necessary to spend all of one's life in the practice of meditation. As with anything, the more that it's practiced, the more you will get out of it; however, with even a small portion of your day, you can see a dramatic change in your overall levels of stress, anxiety and destructive anger.

Exercise 12:

Find a quiet, comfortable space with dim, non-intrusive lighting and sit down.

When you're first starting out, don't worry about anything fancy, just get into a comfortable position where you can relax and maintain good blood circulation (i.e. avoid positions which will cause your arms, legs, etc. from "falling asleep" or experiencing muscle cramps.)

Pick a focal point in the room (preferably something either relaxing or at least neutral) and set your gaze to it for thirty seconds to a minute.

Take a few deep breaths and allow your eyes to close.

With your eyes closed, focus on recreating the image on which you were focused.

When you have a pretty good mental image, start an affirmation (a positive, supportive statement) such as "I am calm." "I am at peace." "I am relaxed." "I am free."

Be sure to keep your affirmations in a positive framing, i.e. "I am" as opposed to "I am not." Also keep the affirmation in the present tense.

When you find your mind wandering, go ahead and direct it back to the affirmation. Allow yourself to relax, but make sure that the affirmation(s) are present.

Continue on with this for your desired amount of time (I would suggest at least five minutes if possible) and when you're ready, slowly open your eyes again, bringing your attention back to the focal point you had used toward the beginning of the exercise.

This is a simple and effective technique to elicit a natural state of relaxation throughout your mind and your body. By focusing on your affirmation, you not only help to reinforce a positive, but you are also training your mind to become and remain focused. Through practice, these effects only increase.

How does this relate to giving up destructive anger?

Anger is one of those things that is always going to be around to some degree. It has to. However, by practicing relaxation/meditation techniques, we allow our minds to let go of the stresses of the day, but not only that. Our bodies themselves are relieved from the tension that is carried in our muscles. The natural state of the human body is a relaxed state. In our modern world, it's unrealistic to be in this state at all times as we have jobs to support our lifestyles, commitments to friends and family, and various other things which engage our time and energy; however, even with regular, short sessions, we can see the profound benefits of this simple and natural process.

When we practice meditation and other relaxation techniques, we are less stressed, less prone to aggravation and even more resistant to illness. When the body doesn't have to split its energy between taking care of its usual processes and reacting to an overflow of stress, it can perform its necessary functions unencumbered. This leaves more vital energy to ward off illness whether induced by external causes such as viruses or bacteria, or the innumerable maladies caused by unresolved stress.

When our stress levels are lowered, we are less inclined to snap like a twig every time frustration comes. I encourage you to allow yourself this wonderful and natural privilege.

How to Smile More Often

Did you know that the simple act of smiling can help lower blood pressure, and can not only be a sign of happiness, but a cause of happiness? When we smile endorphins are released throughout our bodies. Endorphins are basically feel-good chemicals that the body produces and releases in certain physiological contexts. When we smile, we feel good.

The problem is that life can be stressful, and sometimes it's difficult to find a reason to smile. When life isn't going the way that you've planned, or negative situations arise, smiling is often the farthest thing from our minds. In these situations, sometimes it's all that one can do to fake it.

Believe it or not, even fake smiles have their benefits. Not only does

it get our minds and our muscles to be more apt toward smiling, even fake smiles release endorphins. Smiling after a terrible event may not make you magically feel completely better about everything, however, even fake smiles have been shown to lower tension within the body and ease the stress on the mind.

When we smile, others smile. This simple act has a wonderful ripple effect. Studies have shown that smiles are truly contagious. Just think back to a time when you've been troubled or stressed, and you came across someone who was in a good mood and smiling. Even if we're not immediately rid of our stress, that smile has a way of spreading to our own faces. When we're around people who are smiling, we tend to be better at ease, less stressed and more able to face situations with a positive outlook. The best way to create this situation is to be the first to smile.

Not only do we feel better when we smile, other people do as well. People with smiles are more approachable, more accessible and generally put us at ease. Remember that smiles spread, and it's an action that benefits all around. It's easier to connect when we feel at ease with a person, and it's easier for them to connect with us. Smiling gives off a welcoming air, and you might be surprised at how far this impact can reach.

Did you know that people can hear a smile over the phone? Due to the constriction of the face, the sound of a voice changes slightly but perceptibly. We've all had experience talking to people who are smiling, and therefore, we have become acutely aware (whether consciously or unconsciously) of the difference between a smiling voice and a normal or stressed voice. Many telemarketers and phone support employees have been trained this very thing. When you smile over the phone, you're much more likely to make a better connection to the person with whom you are speaking.

You may notice very quickly that the smiles that you give out are returned to you with interest. Our minds are naturally programmed to react to smiles, whether it's a smile from someone else, or if it's on our own faces.

Exercise 13:

Put a sticky note on your mirror with the word “Smile.”

Make sure that it’s in a location that you visit at least a few times throughout the day.

When you see this note, whether you’re in a chipper mood or not, follow its simple direction and smile.

As you go through your day, place the same notes in various other places that you frequent. For instance, on the center of your steering wheel; on your desk, or in your office; on the inside of the front door.

Take note of the interactions that you have when you’re smiling.

Especially notice how often your smile is returned to you or how a situation is made less tense by your smile.

The next time you find yourself overwhelmed, or confronted with a negative situation, remind yourself to smile.

Even if it starts out as a fake smile, performing this simple action lowers stress, ups your endorphins and generally makes life more pleasurable.

Naturally, there are situations in which smiling is inappropriate, but even in such situations, find some time where you can be alone and just smile. Even if it’s only for a few seconds, the power of a smile can greatly improve your feelings about a situation.

How does this relate to giving up destructive anger?

When we smile, we are more relaxed and in a better place with which to confront the stresses and trials of everyday life. When we’re less stressed, we’re more in control of our own emotions, and many an aggravating situation can be diffused by this simple act.

With a decrease in tension, we’re much less liable to be so close to the edge of losing our tempers. This simple act is so powerful that it can truly change your life for the better.

Learn to Communicate Effectively, Lessening the Chance for Miscommunication

Misunderstandings are one of the greatest causes of anger in existence. A moment's reflection will provide at least one example of when simple miscommunication snowballed into a dramatic and/or destructive result. Miscommunication is one of those things that can be difficult to prevent; however, there are a number of ways to lessen the number and severity of misunderstandings.

When we communicate effectively, things run much more smoothly and with a much lower degree of stress and tension. When we are ineffective in our communication, misunderstandings have a tendency of rearing their ugly heads. How then can we combat misunderstandings in our own lives and remove the negative impact which often arises from this miscommunication?

The truth is that simple self-awareness, as referenced earlier in this chapter can go a long way toward cutting down on miscommunication. Before you give a set of instructions, or an opinion, or any important communiqué, take a moment to think over what you are about to say and inspect whether it is clear, whether it could be misconstrued and whether the person has the vernacular to understand what you're trying to say.

Some misunderstandings are the result of using the wrong language to convey the point effectively. It's preferable to describe what you're trying to say in such a way that it could be understood by someone with no knowledge of the field of which you are talking.

Here's a quick example:

You are an expert computer programmer. You have spent years developing and honing your skills to become so adept in your field. You have a conversation with your boss who knows the basics of computer programming, but not all of the intricacies involved in everyday work. You want to tell him about a problem with the code and how it needs to be fixed, but you're finding it difficult to get him to understand what you're saying. You've tried giving him a technical explanation, but he's becoming frustrated. Your job may not be on the line, but you're well aware that a frustrated boss is going to affect not only yourself, but all those who encounter him until he calms down. You take a moment and think about how you would explain it to someone who knows absolutely nothing about the topic. You tell

him that there's an error in the code that is stopping your process from running properly. You will need a little bit of time to find the error and fix it, but it is well within your capabilities to do so. Given this understanding, not only your own frustration is relieved, but that of your boss is as well. You return to your work having made him aware of the issue and assured that you are working toward resolving it.

While this situation was eventually resolved in a positive manner for both employee and supervisor, had the employee began with this simple method of communication, the frustration could have been spared altogether.

Now, we're not all computer programmers, so let's take a look at a more common example, along with the different options for communication and their effects.

You and your spouse have only one vehicle, and so have created a schedule regarding its use. You work different shifts and so getting to and from work is not a problem for either of you, but one day you get a phone call from your boss, asking you to stay late. Your spouse works a later shift than you do, and depending on how late your boss wants you to stay, it may affect their ability to get to work on time.

Option A: You tell your spouse that your boss has asked you to stay late at work. You tell him or her that you don't know yet whether you will be back in time for them to get to work on time by relying on the car. You have a discussion over the possible options and decide to have him or her take you to work and take a bus or taxi home. The situation is resolved quickly and without any miscommunication or frustration.

Option B: You tell your spouse that you will have to stay late at work, but that you don't foresee being late enough to cause an issue with their getting to work on time. When you get to work, you are informed that the project will require you to be there for a few hours after your shift, and will definitely make your spouse late to work if they wait on you. At the first available opportunity, you give your spouse a call and let him or her know the situation. You offer to head home at lunch so that he or she can drive you back and have use of the car, but your spouse says that she can get a ride

with a co-worker. You are able to work without worry, and your spouse is able to get to his or her job on time.

Option C: You tell your spouse that you'll have to work late, but don't bother mentioning that it may affect their ability to get to work on time, and they are counting on being able to use the vehicle. You go to work and by the time you are on your way home, you notice that your spouse is already late for work. You look to your phone and notice a few missed calls from your spouse. You call him or her back, and get an earful. They've found a way to work, but are upset with you for not making them aware of the situation.

Which do you think is the best option? Option C obviously causes a problem, as the lack of effective communication has caused your spouse to be late at work and frustrated with you. Option B is better in that you let your spouse know as soon as you could what the situation was and they were able to work out an alternative. With option A, you communicated effectively and kept in mind the possibility that staying later at work could potentially affect your spouse's ability to get to work on time. Option A is certainly the best possible scenario of the three.

There is, however, a fourth option that is all too common. That is to not bother to mention to your spouse that you will be staying late at all. This option comes with so many levels of unnecessary difficulty that I won't bother going too in-depth with it; however, by not communicating at all, not only is your spouse late for work, there's also a drop in trust. It's not uncommon for the spouse in that situation to start wondering where you are, why you haven't called and what you could possibly be doing that has you out with the car so late. The complete lack of communication has a tendency of causing an argument in and of itself, and can even lead to your husband or wife not trusting that you are where you say you are.

Even if you're not able to communicate immediately, remember that some communication is better than no communication. If you are vague or non-communicative, it's not just that misunderstandings might occur, it's pretty well assured that they will.

Let's look at one final example and see how being vague or unclear can affect a situation.

You decide to go out on the town with some friends. One of your friends picks you up so that you don't have to worry about who has the car. You tell your spouse that you're going out with friends and you'll be back later. You end up coming home at around three o'clock in the morning. Your spouse is waiting up for you when you get home, and is not very happy. The two of you have an argument.

In this situation, the initial vague communication could have solved the problem before it ever even occurred. With an argument like this, you are going to quickly be told how you miscommunicated, and you will be made painfully aware of its effects. There are a few questions that this situation will naturally raise for the hypothetical spouse. Those are "Where were you?" "Who were you out with?" "Why didn't you call when you knew it was getting late?" among many other possible questions. While this can be a learning experience, it can be avoided.

If the person in the example had simply said, "I'm going out with Mike and Jeff. I'm not sure how long we're going to be out, but it'll probably be late. We're going to grab some dinner and play some games at Jeff's house. I'll keep in contact so you have an idea how long I'll be gone, but don't feel like you have to wait up for me. If you need anything while I'm gone, let me know." It really is that simple. In a matter of a few sentences, what could potentially be a very upsetting situation is resolved, no argument needed to happen and the situation can be a positive for all parties involved.

By directing your words in a way that is clear, understandable, timely and thorough, the frustration and anger causing effects of miscommunication and not enough communication are avoided.

Exercise 14:

In your journal, make a note of the misunderstandings in which you have been involved, or which you have witnessed during the course of the day.

Make note of what the misunderstanding was about and its result.

Given the outcome of the situation, investigate what could have been done to prevent the misunderstanding from occurring, i.e. was information given clearly? Timely? Understandably? Thoroughly?

Beneath every instance or on a separate page, write down what could have been said or done differently to ensure a better overall result.

When we're clear and thorough in our communication, so many pitfalls can be avoided. By taking note of misunderstandings and miscommunications, their causes and effects, it helps one to be more aware of their own communication skills or deficiencies. With this awareness, it's then possible to make the necessary improvements to avoid these failures in communication.

There is one more thing to say regarding miscommunication. That is that often we are the ones who are misunderstanding what's being said, or what's happening. In order to help rectify this, it's important to make sure that you absolutely understand what is being said. A simple way of verifying this is to repeat the procedure to the person with whom you are speaking.

For instance: "Okay, so after you head to the mall, you're going to stop over a friend's house. I need to put the pizza in the oven at five o'clock, and set a timer for twelve minutes. You should be home by eleven with a few of your friends, and you'll bring the drinks with you?" If there's a correction that needs to be made, it will be offered freely at this point.

Another example: "So, you'll need the document by five o'clock on Friday, and you want me to double-check the numbers in the fifth chapter to make sure that they correlate with the figures from last quarter?" Again, if there's any missing or inaccurate information, the person with whom you are speaking will let you know at this point.

It's not always necessary to repeat things out loud, but in

circumstances where there is an increased possibility of a misunderstanding, or the specifics are of particular importance, it not only greatly reduces the possibility of miscommunication, but also shows attentiveness. If you are unclear about a given set of instructions, or a piece of information, don't hesitate to ask for clarification.

How does this apply to giving up anger?

Miscommunication is often the reason why things can get out of control in an otherwise innocuous situation. By improving one's communication skills, many situations in which frustration and destructive anger arise are simply and effectively avoided. By being clear and asking for clarification when necessary, you not only sidestep possible misunderstanding, but you also show the person with whom you are speaking that you care about what they are saying. This in and of itself can provide a much smoother relationship, and a greater amount of understanding.

Give Up Worrying

If you think that giving up worry is an easy proposition, ask a parent. I've met parents who are so overcome with worry at a child's being home even a few minutes late that it's made them physically ill.

It's obviously not just parents that deal with worry, we all do. Whether it's over bills, our home, our family or friends, our jobs, the state of the world, politics, the environment or any of the other countless things which we encounter on a daily basis, worry has a tendency to permeate our lives.

The problem is that worry doesn't do anything other than cause stress and anxiety. Worry isn't what pays the bills; it's the act of having sufficient income through work or other sources. Worry isn't what will solve the depletion of the rainforests; it's taking the problem seriously enough to do something about it. Worry doesn't make our spouses faithful; it's by living a relationship of mutual trust and respect that has the greatest impact.

The important thing to notice in these random examples is what actually does make the change. It's action. By acting toward a goal, we can affect the outcome. To repeat a phrase, worry doesn't do anything other than cause stress and anxiety.

Granted, there are some things which are out of our immediate realm of control. We don't control what the weather is going to do tomorrow, but we can utilize the tools available to us (weather forecasts, etc.) to plan for it. We don't control what the stock market will do, but we can make sound investments based off of the best advice and most accurate market trends available to us. There are things that we can't plan for, but the point is that by spending our time worrying about it, we give up our ability to do something about it.

The world of worry is a world of surrender to external forces as being hostile and completely out of control. The interesting point here is that if one so perceives the world, wouldn't they be the ones

who most want to affect change?

Worry isn't logical. Sometimes it's based off of logical concerns, such as, "I worry for my children's safety." I think it's difficult to argue against that, or say that worrying for the safety of one's children is in any way unusual or negative. In fact, it's natural and positive to be concerned for the wellbeing of ourselves and of others, especially those so close to us as our children, but when worry causes us to become stagnant, we have let it take over our lives.

Have you ever seen someone who's constantly worried who is also generally happy? It's true that even the most worrying individuals have their moments of pleasure and abandon, however, it's much more difficult for these moments to have any lasting effect. It's much more common to start to worry about when the happiness will go away, and thus create a worrisome situation.

It's natural to worry, at least to some degree. But what can we do to not let worry take over our lives and shut out our happiness?

Learn the Various Ways to Relax Yourself

Worry, like anger, has its place. In our modern world, however, it's so easy to let it get out of hand. To paraphrase a cliché, you can't turn on the news without finding some terrible thing that in some way affects your life. However, there are things that you can do to not allow worry to take the wheel and drive you off of a cliff.

In the last chapter, we discussed meditation and relaxation. Those of their own merit can make a profound impact on our level of worry, and how much we allow it to permeate our lives. Along with those exercises though, there's one simple question to ask yourself in order to give you a clear direction. "Is there anything that I can do about it?"

It sounds so simple, and yet it's quite rare to find an individual who thoroughly espouses the responsibility of asking this question. If there's something that you can do to affect a better outcome with a given situation, then work out the steps necessary and do it. If, however, there isn't anything that you can do, then why allow yourself to be overtaken by this worry?

This process is easier said than done, but at the same time, it is much more worthwhile, not only for peace of mind, but for our mental and physical health as well to prioritize our worries.

When you find yourself overcome by worry, caused by a situation about which you can do nothing, here's a simple idea that can help get you through it: Find something proactive to do in another area of your life. Turn something that worries you into fuel for something which fulfills you. It's interesting to note how many luminaries had their beginnings in very difficult situations of which they had no control. We've all heard about the actor, the musician or the fashion model who came up from humble, often disturbing beginnings to turn their lives into something not only worthwhile, but celebratory.

We've all heard the term making lemonade when life gives you a lemon, well the truth is that this can work in ways that are difficult to even imagine. How many musicians came through years of frustration, and used that to provide their deep, insightful lyrics? How many successful businessmen were born to very poor homes? How many Olympic athletes came through mountains of adversity to become the best in the world?

Here are a couple of examples of situations regarding how worry can be translated into success:

A teenager has grown up in a difficult household. His father left when he was young and his mother has to work two jobs just to keep the small apartment in which they live. The young man is often concerned about his mother and how hard she works. At the same time, there's not much that he can do about the situation. He's too young to get a job, and he has schoolwork to attend to. He vows to himself that when he grows older, things will be different. He works hard in school and brings home good grades. It's difficult, but he makes it through graduation and, due to his hard work and perseverance, he has his choice of colleges. He even qualifies for a scholarship at a very prestigious school. This scholarship will not only pay for his college, but give him a little bit extra to help out his mother. Things still aren't easy, but he works hard throughout his college career and graduates with full honors. Within a very short while of his graduation, he is

offered a lucrative position in his chosen field. He starts work that he loves. Not only that, he is able to help his mother to the point that she doesn't have to work two jobs to keep food on the table. Both of their lives are improved.

A young woman has gone through, and just gotten out of a terrible and violent relationship. She has hit rock bottom, but refuses to give up. She has a particular talent with words, and has always enjoyed creating stories. She's still very traumatized by the events of the past, and has an incredibly diminished sense of self-worth. It has become a troubling worry for her that the terrible things her abusive ex said about her are true. She can't change the past, but she vents her pain and her anger through the written word. It's not long before she's written a full-length novel about a woman overcoming a similar situation. By creating solutions for her character, she finds that she is uplifted herself. Her words are powerful. One of her friends talks her into submitting it to publishers, and it's not long before she has an offer on the table.

We don't all come from these difficult backgrounds, and we're not all scholars or novelists, but there are things that we can do in our own lives in order to combat worry and learn to find a tension-relieving outlet for our difficulties and concerns.

Exercise 15:

The next time you find yourself preoccupied with worry, ask yourself "Is there anything that I can do to change this situation.

If so, map out a plan of action in your journal and work toward overcoming the matter at hand. For instance, if you're worried about not having enough income, see what you can do in your place of employment to move toward a promotion. Participate in elective training sessions and/or make a list of things in the office which could be improved and go about making the suggestions or improvements to enact these changes. Don't be afraid to enquire about the possibility of a promotion and what may be necessary to be considered.

If not, think of a creative way to turn your worry into something

positive. For instance, if you're worried about climate change, get in touch with a local environmental group and see what you can do to volunteer. Even if it's something as simple as collecting recyclables from the neighborhood, you can still turn your concern into action. You may not be able to single-handedly alter the climate, but you would be working in your own way to lessen the impact of your community.

Another example would be if you have endured hardship in your past and there is always that thought in the back of your mind that you might end up back in that same situation, take the pain, frustration and/or lessons that you have learned from the experience and make it amount to something positive. If you grew up in meager circumstances, save a certain amount of money from each paycheck as a "what if" fund. If you have endured abuse in your past, contact a center that focuses on helping victims of abuse and let your strength be a pillar to others who are going through similar circumstances.

Again, the important thing is action. The above are just a few examples of situations that are possible, and you have to decide for yourself what it is that's worrying you, but use your skills and talents to remove, or at least augment your worry into a more positive thing. The antithesis of destruction is creation. The antithesis of worry is action. Be creative, be strong and be proud. There's not another you on the planet, and we all have something wonderful to offer the world and ourselves. Let worry be a motivator, not a game-stopper.

As the title of this section is in regard to finding ways to relax, the following is another technique toward finding relaxation.

Exercise 16:

When you find yourself troubled by worry, find a nice quiet place to sit or lie down.

Decide before you proceed if your worry is something that you can do something about or not.

Focus on your breathing to the exclusion of everything else for

thirty seconds to a minute.

Take three deep breaths.

Now focus on the thing that is worrying you. Focus on it intensely for thirty seconds to a minute, allowing the tension created by your worry to build up in your body.

Next imagine this worry as a set of chains around your body, weighing you down.

Take three more breaths.

If the worry is something that you can do something about, take this time to visualize yourself taking the necessary steps to rectify the situation. If not, proceed directly to step nine.

Now imagine yourself lifting your arms and throwing off the chains.

Imagine yourself in a peaceful setting. This can be on a warm, sandy beach; a serene forest by a lake; or whatever scenario you find to be most relaxing, most calming.

Focus on the lightness and the freedom that comes with being unhindered.

Take three deep breaths and revel in the feeling of freeing yourself as you slowly open your eyes.

This technique can be repeated as often as necessary, and some of these steps (particularly step ten) can and should be elongated to allow yourself to get the greatest benefit from your relaxation and mental exercise of freeing yourself from your worry.

How does this relate to giving up worry?

Finding a way to relax when your mind is troubled by worry can be a difficult proposition. However, relaxation directly combats worry. When you allow yourself to relax, you put yourself at more ease. It may not be a panacea, but through practice and action, you can lessen the frequency of anxiety and make great strides toward processing and channeling your worries into a more productive

action.

There are times when nothing but outside help such as visiting a physician or a therapist will provide the necessary assuagement of worry, and this should never be discounted. Be sure to consult your physician if you are not able to stop your worry or if it turns into something that so impacts your life that you are losing the ability to properly function. This section can, however, be helpful in identifying unnecessary worry and mitigating its effects.

Learn to Overcome Your Fears

We all have things which frighten us. Whether it's a fear of heights, of the dark, of the unknown or even something as simple as being in an uncomfortable situation, fear has a way of spreading itself into areas of our lives to which it is unproductive.

It's natural and necessary to have fear of a number of things, but it's when the fear is irrational or extends to a point that is beyond our ability to cope that we find ourselves encumbered, rather than helped by it.

Fear can stop us from doing what we want to do and what we need to do. Fear of rejection, fear of failure and even fear of success can stand in our way if we let it. It may seem impossible to overcome your fears, but nothing is more worthwhile.

Here are a few examples of how overcoming fear can be a natural step toward our progress in our professional and personal lives:

Jane has been working in her position for over ten years. She has seen many people younger than her, with less experience in the field and less time at the company be promoted ahead of her. She has often found herself contemplating asking her boss for a promotion. She certainly has the skill set required to not only function, but succeed in a higher position, but she doubts herself and worries that her boss may not recognize her skills. Sometimes, she even questions whether she is actually as good at her job as she appears to herself. There is a promotion opening up, and Jane wants nothing more than to put herself forward as

a candidate, but even though she would be a shoo-in for the position, she gives into her fear of failure and doesn't bother trying. Someone half her age and with much less aptitude is given the promotion.

John has been interested in Cindy for quite a while. She's attractive, intelligent and has all of the other qualities that he's looking for in a potential mate, but he's scared of being turned down. He and Cindy have known each other long enough to have seen each other in most circumstances, and one night, the two of them are watching a movie together at Cindy's house. It is pretty evident that Cindy is interested in him, but John is having trouble coming forward with his feelings. At one point she leans her head on his shoulder and says, "You know John, I bet you would make a great husband." Although he's initially exhilarated by the blatant recognition of interest, he's immediately overcome by the fear that he'll either be rejected, or that things won't work out. Rather than let Cindy know that he's interested in being more than friends with her, John sits there quietly. When the movie is over, Cindy goes home, and John is kicking himself for not taking a chance.

These are a couple of simple situations where an opportunity is right there within reach, but giving into fear snatches it away. In the instance of Jane, she would have not only been better paid and in a higher position, but she would have been a benefit to others in a promoted capacity as well. In the case of John, it became very apparent that Cindy shared his feelings, but despite the fact that the two of them could be very happy together, his fear prevented him from taking the chance.

There are multitudinous instances that we face daily when our fears and apprehensions take hold and we have the choice to overcome it, or let it win. In this set of examples, let's see what can happen when fears are faced and overcome.

Mary has worked as a paralegal for a few years. She had attended college during the first year of working for this law firm, but seeing how much goes into being a lawyer, she decided to drop out and continue on in her present position. She's

become very well versed, not only in her own work, but has gained a lot of insight into the inner workings of being a lawyer. Although she has gained a great deal of knowledge and skill, she still has a great deal of trepidation about going back to school. She grapples with the idea, and finally decides to get out of her own way. She goes back to school at night while continuing to work as a paralegal during the day. She finishes up her schooling and passes the bar with flying colors and goes on to have a successful career practicing law.

Nick is afraid that his children will get injured while playing. To this end, he has often been very strict about them playing outside. Because of this, his kids are usually in front of the television, tethered to one of their many video games. Realizing that while he has his fears about his children playing outside or with friends, he's not allowing them to experience a life outside of electronic entertainment. He wants them to be well rounded individuals, and so he decides to face his fears and start easing his restrictions. It's a slow process at first, but before long his kids are outside getting exercise and developing their social skills by playing with their friends.

Facing and overcoming one's fears isn't an easy proposition, but it's something that can lead to a more fulfilling life, not only for ourselves, but for those around us as well. Even a completely rational fear, such as that of protecting one's children can lead to irrational actions. It is therefore necessary to ask one's self whether the fear is rational, and if it is rational, is it leading to an irrational overcorrection.

Exercise 17:

In your journal, make a list of what frightens you most.

Mark each item with either an "R" (Rational) or an "I" (Irrational) to classify what type of fear it is.

For the irrational fears, write down what it is that causes you so much trepidation, and write out the reasons why this fear is irrational.

For the rational fears, investigate whether your reactions to these fears are rational or irrational.

Step four requires a little more investigation so, with someone you trust and feel comfortable talking to (spouse, significant other, family member, good friend, therapist, etc.,) get a second opinion. You may not always agree with their response to whether your reactions are rational or not, but if nothing else, it'll give you a good outside perspective regarding your fears and your reactions to them.

If your reactions are irrational, along with writing out your own possible angles of attack, get advice from someone you trust on ways to react in a more rational way.

If your fears are rational and your reactions to them are rational, pat yourself on the back.

Often times the best thing that a person can do regarding their fears is to talk to someone about it. If they're normal fears then even a brief discussion can help to provide a better perspective and give you motivation toward resolving issues stemming from these fears. If they're irrational, or you can't help but perpetuate an irrational reaction to these fears, it might be time to look into counseling.

How does this apply to giving up worry?

Fear is the predominant cause of worry. By confronting your fears and improving your reaction to your fears, you've gone a long way in lessening the amount of worry in your life.

Give Up Insecurity

Insecurity is not only one of the most annoying character flaws, but it's also one of the most destructive. When we're insecure, we're much more likely to look outside of ourselves for our worth, driving our locus away from ourselves and placing our self-worth in the hands of others who have much less concern for our welfare than we do.

Much of the focus of marketing and advertising is intended to make us feel insecure. If we're insecure, we're much more likely to buy a product that claims it will make us cooler, sexier, better-rounded, less of the stupid, fat, filthy, whiny morons that advertisers would have us believe that we are. Granted, if any of the products in existence actually made someone a better person, I'd be the first to tell everyone to go out and buy, buy, buy. However, real change comes from within, and when we're insecure, positive change is much more difficult to affect.

Don't misunderstand me. Insecurity leads to all sorts of changes. You feel ugly, so you buy the latest fashion and accessories; you feel socially awkward, so you'll sign up for that dating site for other made-to-feel-awkward people; you feel stupid, so you'll sign up for that monthly membership that purports itself to create geniuses. We've all fallen prey to insecurity at one point or another. The problem with these changes is that they're more often than not just a superficial change that doesn't affect the true problem(s) within us: insecurity.

Insecurity often leads to an overcorrection. There's the significant other who is so insecure that you have to reassure them on a daily basis that you really do like them, and you're not just waiting for someone better to come along while they're going through your cell phone looking for suspicious text messages. Or the D- student who somehow graduates and makes a point of making other people feel more unintelligent than they're pretending to be. The less said about guys in their oversized trucks and SUVs that they only use to run to the grocery store, the better.

Insecurity breeds insecurity. Ten-thousand yeses and one no is a no. Not only that, the no becomes bigger than every yes in the world. It's interesting to note that many very successful people are some of the most insecure people around. There are famous actors who can't get past the one bad review they had in a sea of positives. There are the businesspeople that run themselves bankrupt by buying more and more grandiose things so that they appear successful to no one in particular, but everyone in general.

Human beings are social creatures and we want to be perceived in a positive light by our peers and by society in general. It's no wonder that insecurity is so rampant, especially in our world of advertising that tells us that no matter what we do with our lives, no matter how much we have in the bank, no matter how good we look, get along with others, work or play, it will never be good enough.

What can we do to fight the urge to fight ourselves?

Building Self-Confidence

Simple, right? If you said yes to the previous question, give yourself another pat on the back. You're one of the few.

There is a difference between self-confidence and arrogance. In fact, the two are usually complete opposites. Arrogance is all about appearances, and is generally a symptom of a lack of self-confidence. "I feel small, so I need to make others feel tiny."

Being confident in ourselves is to be empowered, ready, able and willing to succeed at our goals. Self-confidence, however, can be difficult to come by. When the whole world is telling you that you're not good enough, it can be difficult to tune out the dross and realize your potential.

The first thing to realize is that you're not alone. We're all marketed to in the same way, and we're all susceptible to questioning or abandoning our self-confidence; but it's not all advertising's fault. As social creatures, we have a tendency to form ourselves into cliques. These cliques vary greatly, but there is one common rule for most of these groups: if you're not like us, we don't want to have you around.

What defines “alike” can vary greatly. For instance, people who have similar interests, but come from varied cultures or backgrounds can certainly be a clique. People who live in a certain part of town, drive a certain type of car or have a certain amount of money in their bank account are all examples of these tight-knit social circles. When we grow older, we like to tell ourselves that such things are isolated to high-school, but the truth is that we have a tendency to hold onto this pre-judgment of ourselves and others throughout our lives.

Every workplace has its own version of “the popular kids,” or the “rebels,” or “the freaks,” that was prevalent in school. Grownups have generally learned how to get along with a wider group of people throughout the course of their lives, however there are always certain types of people that we feel more comfortable around and those that make us feel uncomfortable or awkward.

In order to increase our levels of self-confidence, it’s important to realize that what happens external to our own circle of interest doesn’t need to affect the way that we feel about ourselves. One of the most effective ways of improving your level of self-confidence is to be aware of your own skills, abilities and positive traits.

Exercise 18:

The next time you feel insecurity building up within you, take a moment to write down the situation.

After you’ve written a brief explanation, explore what it is that is actually bringing up this insecurity. Is someone telling you about their new promotion while you’re stuck in the same crappy position where you’ve been for as long as you can remember? Have you run across an advertisement that makes you feel like you’re nowhere near enough? Have you gotten jealous over a loved one spending time with someone else? Etc.

Take a few hours or a day away from this particular entry. After you’ve had some time away from the issue in question, take a closer look at what you’ve written down.

Do these insecurities have anything to do with you really, or are they rising up from someone else’s standard of what success is?

Make a note of this.

Think back to previous experiences where you've felt insecurity for similar reasons and try to think back to an initial incident that may be behind the insecurity. Not all insecurities have such deep-rooted causes, but the vast majority of them do.

After your entry, write down in big, bold letters, “Does this actually reflect something wrong with me, or am I just afraid of being good enough from the perspective of other people?”

Write down the things relating to the entry about which you do feel confident. For example: if the insecurity arises from someone at work being better at a particular type of project than you, write down the areas in which you have a great deal of expertise. If you find yourself feeling unattractive, make note of the things about your appearance that you do like (I have great eyes, wonderful hair, a perfectly proportioned nose, etc.)

Build upon these things that you like about yourself. If you have great skill in one area, but are not as skilled as you would like to be in another, look for ways to improve your aptitude.

Finish off each one of these entries with a positive statement about yourself. “I’m unique and beautiful/handsome.” “I’m a phenomenal worker.” “I’m very skilled at _____. ” “I’m great at getting along with others, regardless of what differences we may have.” Etc.

Below this positive statement, write the words, “That is why I’m good enough.”

Everyone has something about which they can be confident. Sometimes it’s a grandiose thing, sometimes it’s a simple skill or good perspective. The fact of the matter is that we can all benefit from an increase of self-confidence. When we compare ourselves to some unrealistic standard, we are all going to fall short. In fact, even the people in a particularly insecurity-breeding advertisement are more than likely full of their own insecurities.

Learn what it takes to be you and rejoice in the fact that you have the power to be happy within yourself.

How does this relate to giving up insecurity?

Like many of the sections in this book the topic of this section is the antithesis of the issue stated in the chapter title. Self-confidence is not only the opposite of insecurity, it's the way to overcome insecurity. By being confident within yourself, you will find that the standards, perceptions or prejudices of other people don't have the same hold on you that they've had before.

Give yourself the freedom and permission to judge yourself by your own merits, not by what other people set forth as an ideal.

Explore Strategies to Enhance the Self-Image

Our self-image is the lens through which we view ourselves. Regardless of what we actually are in an objective sense, we have a tendency to form our own opinions about ourselves which may or may not coincide with reality. When our self-image is out of whack, it's difficult to not give in to insecurity.

One of the most dramatic examples of this is regarding people with anorexia. For those who may not know, anorexia is a terrible eating disorder in which an individual will lose weight to the point of becoming unhealthy. Even when the individual is greatly underweight, they have a tendency to think of themselves as too big. The self-image of a great number of people with this disorder have is one of being overweight. When asked to identify which of a particular group of people they feel that they most closely resemble, it's almost across the board that they perceive themselves as being among the largest people in the group. It's not uncommon for a person with anorexia, weighing less than one-hundred pounds to feel as if they are morbidly obese.

The above is a pretty extreme example; however, a negative self-image affects us all to a certain extent. There are things about ourselves that we would like to change or improve, and it's healthy to want to improve, but when this comes at the expense of our mental or physical health, something must be done to put an end to it.

Exercise 19:

Write down the things about yourself that you can and can't

change that are affecting your self-image in a negative way. Mark these with “can” and “can’t”.

For now, we’ll focus on the things that you can change. Rank these in order of importance with a scale of one to five; one being something that you can accept and live with, five being something that is having a profound negative effect on your self-image.

Make note of whether the higher-ranked items (specifically fours and fives) have any similarities. If so, make a separate section for these things.

Next to each of the items that you can change, write a short description of the steps that you can take in order to make a positive improvement toward your self-image. Start with the higher ranked items and then move down to the lower ranked items, leaving items ranked at a one alone for now.

Honestly and fearlessly ask yourself whether these things on your list are objectively rational reasons to have a diminished self-image.

If yes, go on with this exercise as written.

If no, create a separate page for all of the irrationalities that are leading you to a diminished self-image and try to trace these items back to their original source. By recognizing and confronting the source of these things, much (if not all) of their power over you has a tendency to vanish. This process, especially in more extreme cases is helped dramatically with one-on-one counseling with a qualified therapist.

With those things that are negatively affecting your self-image (and are also objectively rational) discuss with someone close to you the feelings that you have and the way that they have been affecting your life in a negative way. (This should be with a person who is a positive, uplifting influence. Doing this with someone who’s negative toward you will only serve to bring you down farther)

Keep an updated list of these self-image issues and continue to work these items down to the point where they’ve become

acceptable.

Every day, write at least one thing about you that you're proud of or thankful for. This can be the way that you handled a situation or it could be something about your inner and/or outer workings that makes you unique and wonderful.

Smile.

As with many things regarding our perceptions of ourselves, two things are most important: Perspective and acceptance. If there's something that's been really affecting you negatively in regard to your self-image, obtaining a clearer perspective of your feelings puts them in a more workable light. In fact, many of the issues that seem overwhelming at times can be recognized for their relative insignificance when given the proper perspective.

After a better perspective has been achieved, there is the need for acceptance. There are things that we can change about ourselves, and there are things that we can't. Learning to accept these things that we cannot change frees us from their binding influence.

As with everything, there are things which are important to change and things which are important to accept. If you're doing something, or have some perspective that is harming you or others, this would fall into the must change category. For the things which aren't hurting others, but are only hurting ourselves because we allow them to, it's most important to accept these things for what they are and begin to focus more on our positive traits.

How does this apply to giving up insecurity?

By forming a more realistic and more optimistic self-image, we remove feelings of helplessness and replace them with strength. Inner strength combats insecurity at its very core. A person who is secure doesn't let the feelings or opinions of others ruin their self-image. Finding this inner strength is paramount when overcoming insecurity and its benefits can be seen in all areas of one's life.

Give Up Complaining

Complaining, like worry, doesn't really get you anywhere. There are situations when a person will give you what you want just to get you to be quiet about the matter, but this is a short-term solution with long-term consequences.

There are instances in which it's necessary to make a complaint. If you're in a restaurant that serves you uncooked or rotten food, a complaint should be made so that you don't get sick or go hungry. If someone is harassing you, it's absolutely necessary to put an end to it. However, these are not the things of which this chapter is referring.

The general thrust of this chapter is in regard to unnecessary complaints. We all know someone who is a whiner, and we've all been guilty of this at one time or another. Constantly complaining about the lot that you're given not only undercuts your ability to progress and improve, it actively destroys it.

How to we combat this?

Learn How to Appreciate What You Have

There will always be someone in the world that has more of something than we do. Even someone like Bill Gates, the wealthiest man in the world, wants something more than what he has. If he didn't, he would be content with where he is and not bother working to improve his life or the lives of others.

Many of us find it easy to think that we have it worse off than other people do. The fact of the matter is that you have a lot more than you may think. Positivity and gratitude can be difficult when we're being told a million times a day that we can't be happy unless we have X product and buy a boatload of Y product and make sure that we're the first one in our circle to own Z product. In fact, in many ways our society goes out of its way to force scarcity into our lives, whether actual or implied.

The fact of the matter is that most of us have more junk than we'd

ever need. Advertising works on the principle exploiting the need for a product. This happens whether we actually need it or not. There are a few quick tips to driving away that implanted false need to never stop acquiring.

Exercise 20: Caveat venditor.

When you find yourself compelled to buy a product that isn't one of the necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter, etc.,) ask yourself, "Do I really need this?" If so, go ahead and buy away.

If not, rate on a scale of one to ten how much you want this thing. If it's less than a five, don't bother with it any more at all.

If it's more than five but less than ten, give it a week before going ahead with this purchase. During this time, hop on the internet or ask some people their opinions of the product. (Don't just look at positives or negatives, look at both.) Decide whether you still want the item more, less or the same as you did before you took this time.

If you want it the same or more, check your budget and make your purchase in a way that won't break the bank. If you find yourself wanting it less, then you have your answer.

If you've rated the item at a ten, give it two weeks and then follow the rest of the third and fourth steps.

By doing this, you will be less tempted to make an impulse purchase, or take what you already have for granted. The best way in my experience to appreciate what you don't have, however, is to work with people who have less than you do. If you have food on the table, a place to live in and clothes on your back, you already have things better than much of the world. Giving back not only enriches the lives of the people that you help, but it enriches your life in a way that puts things into perspective.

Now, material items aren't the only things that we should learn to appreciate. In fact, contrary to popular belief, they're a lot lower on the list than we generally like to think. The things that bring true joy and fulfillment in our lives are the people around us, the things

that we do to improve ourselves from the inside out and what we contribute to society and the world.

Quite possibly the most commonly neglected category that we should learn to be grateful for includes the people that we love and care about. We have a tendency to take for granted the people who have shared in our lives and experiences for a long time, even though they are the ones who most deserve our appreciation.

Exercise 21:

The next time you feel like complaining about the things or the relationships that you don't have, or wish you had better, write your grievances in your journal.

Be as detailed as you like, but be sure to include the reasons why you feel that these people are not enough.

If there are people in your life that are truly a destructive influence, then write out the reasons why you have chosen to encourage their destruction by remaining close to them.

With the people who are not destructive, but not perfect either, write down how many days you have gone since your last mistake.

When the number invariably stays at zero (or in extremely rare cases, one,) write down why you think that you need to judge others so harshly and withhold your appreciation of them while you yourself are not perfect. Yes, some mistakes are bigger than others, but just be honest with yourself and write them down as you make them.

Finally, write down what these people have contributed to your life and when you get the chance, thank them for it.

How does this apply to giving up complaining?

When we appreciate the people that enrich our lives, or the things that make our lives better, any reason to complain about it goes right out the window. We should always strive to better ourselves and seek out others who do the same, but there are those in our

lives who help us be better, or even give a kind word when it's needed that are more than worthy of our appreciation

Explore Strategies and Brainstorm Solutions to Change the Status Quo

Regardless how much there is in our lives to appreciate, there is always room for improvement. Often we get stuck in a rut and things which are no longer useful to us, or have even become detrimental have just become such a common part of our lives that it's easy to let these situations stay as they are... although we're more than happy to complain about them.

So, we have a choice in front of us. There are things that would be better off different, and it's up to us to decide whether we want to make the effort, or annoy our friends and family with our complaints. I think you know which one I'm going to suggest...

So what part(s) of your life is/are stagnant? What would you need to do in order to shake up the status quo and make things more interesting? Let's take a look at a few examples of how this can be done.

Mark and Maureen have been married for twenty-five years. They love each other very much, but the only time that they can find to get away with one another is their yearly camping trip in the mountains. It's a trip that they took when they were first married but, although there are many memories there and it's a comfortable retreat, the two of them have gotten so used to doing the same thing that all of the excitement has gone out of it. Because they're not ready to let their time together become a formality, Mark and Maureen make new plans for this year's vacation. It's going to take some saving and some planning, but they enact their plan and spend their vacation in Paris. By the second day there, the two of them decide to declare it a second honeymoon.

John works from home. He has been so wrapped up with work that it's difficult for him to find the time to spend with his loved ones. In truth, it's about all that he can do to leave the house anymore. He makes a lot of plans for "when things slow down,"

but the more he works, the more demand there is for his time and his talents. Not wanting to turn down any reasonable offer, John has gotten into the habit of pushing his life outside of his work farther and farther back in order to accommodate his growing workload. Finally, one day John has had enough. He has a few things to finish up, and he's not one to renege on his promise to complete a project, but he makes a concrete plan to take two weeks off. During the time leading up to this, John works hard and receives a lot of offers. He replies by saying that he would be interested in working with these new clients, but makes sure to let them know that he will be unable to work during this specific time that he set aside. He finishes up his projects and is able to take a break from his duties. It's during this time that John meets Jane.

When we learn to prioritize the things in our lives and are willing to make changes when things have become status-quo, we open ourselves up to a world of opportunity. It's a lot more difficult to complain about the way things always are when we don't allow things to always be a certain way.

Exercise 22:

Take an inventory of the things in your life which have become stagnant.

Next to each item on this list, write out what you can do to change things up and allow excitement and room for personal growth.

Share this list with one or more people close to you and get their support (we're a lot more likely to do something when we have one or more people there to cheer us on.)

When the time comes to make the change, the time for excuses has passed. Make the change quickly and completely.

If you run into any difficulties, augment your plan to suit your needs. Just make sure that you don't allow yourself to backslide into familiar patterns.

How does this apply to giving up complaining?

By changing the areas of our lives which no longer work for us, we allow excitement and fulfillment to enter in. When we get out of our comfort zones and try something new, we don't have a reason to complain that things are going nowhere. If we're always complaining, we are ignoring our abilities to change situations for the better and that's what this section is all about.

Give Up Making Excuses

Benjamin Franklin once said, “He who is good at making excuses is seldom good for anything else.” Making excuses is hardly a plan of action; in fact, it’s a demonstration that we are unwilling or incapable of doing a given thing. Whether it’s why we didn’t get something done or why we aren’t willing to make a change for the better, making excuses not only shows a lack of responsibility, it’s a good way to lose out on later opportunities.

Take Responsibility of Your Own Life

It’s something that we see celebrities and politicians do every day: Make an excuse as to why they made a mistake. Even though people tend to trust others who admit to their mistakes and take responsibility for them, making excuses seems to be a growing problem.

Let’s jump right into a few examples of situations where people make excuses. Decide for yourself how you think it’ll go over:

Nyla has been late to work with an increased frequency. Her boss finally calls her into her office to see what’s going on. Nyla explains that this morning, she was running out of gas and had to stop to fill up. She says that yesterday, every stoplight was red. The day before, Nyla says, the people in front of her were driving so slowly that she couldn’t make it on time. She goes on and details how her never being on time is not her fault, and the only reason her boss lets her go on is because he’s astounded at how deluded she is.

In this example, the boss would probably say one thing. This one thing destroys every excuse that she has, but I wonder if Nyla would recognize that fact. “Leave your house earlier.” With that sentence, all of Nyla’s excuses place the responsibility where it actually belongs: with her. How much longer do you think that Nyla is going to have her job?

Let’s try another example:

Ben is a stereotypical college kid. He stays out late drinking with his friends and rarely gets his homework in on time (if at all.) When his student advisor tells him that he's about to fail out of class, Ben has all sorts of excuses as to why he has been rendered incapable of performing his duties as a student. "The professors are giving out too many assignments; I can't keep up with all of it." "I didn't get my books for three weeks, so it became impossible to catch up." "My friends just keep bugging me to hang out, so I never have time to do my work."

How much longer do you think that Ben is going to be in college at this rate?

At its core, the sole purpose of an excuse is washing one's hands of responsibility. Whether it's a good excuse or not, in the end, all that we're doing is dodging this responsibility and trying to put it on another person or an event in order to make ourselves come across as blameless.

It bears stating here that there is a difference between an excuse and an explanation. If you are asked whether you broke a glass, an explanation would be, "Yes I did. I didn't have a good grip and it slipped out of my fingers. I'm sorry." An excuse would be, "Well, the glass was way too slippery. I don't know how you hang onto those things. You should get different glasses." The difference is that the person giving the explanation is taking responsibility for what happened while detailing what happened. The person who makes the excuse is blaming the glass and the person who bought it, and implies that the glass was inevitably going to break anyway.

When we don't take responsibility for our own actions, it's basically like holding up a big sign with large letters that read, "You can't trust anything I say." We all make mistakes, and it's far better to admit them and deal with the consequences immediately than to make excuses and let the consequences build until they blow up in our faces.

Exercise 23:

The next time you make a mistake and start blaming someone or something for it, stop for a moment and take a deep breath.

Go over what actually happened and think of ways that the mistake could have been avoided.

When the time comes to explain your actions (or lack of action) take responsibility. “I didn’t study enough,” or “I should have left the house sooner,” are a lot better than trying to pass the blame.

Take note of how the person to whom you are explaining the situation takes it. They may not be jumping for joy, but as a general rule, the fallout will be incredibly less than it would be if you were to excuse your actions as not your responsibility.

Repeat.

How does this apply to giving up excuses?

By taking responsibility, you not only come across as thoughtful, but trustworthy as well. We all make mistakes, but we’re much more likely to forgive someone else (and even ourselves) if we are forthright with the situation. When we take responsibility, we don’t need excuses to pass the blame, we’re honest enough to take our fair share of it.

Learn to Trust and Support Yourself

One of the most common opening-phrase for excuses is, “I can’t.” This short phrase is usually followed by an explanation of the outside forces that will explain why we can’t, trying to prove how it’s not our fault.

Obviously, there are situations where this phrase is absolutely true without the need for the attached excuse. For instance, if someone asked me or you to lift a pickup truck over our heads, “I can’t,” is pretty much all that a person can say. To this end, there are two general situations in which the phrase “I can’t” is absolutely justified: A: When something is beyond our realm of ability, and it wouldn’t matter how much we tried (such as with the picking up the pickup example) or B: When something is outside of our ethical code (although this could fall under won’t.) In other cases, the phrase, “I can’t right now,” or “I can’t yet,” are much more honest.

However, there are many situations throughout our lives where we

may be able to do something, if only we were to trust ourselves enough to try. If it's something that we have to do, or something that we want to do, but don't yet have the skills for it comes down to a matter of trusting ourselves that we can learn.

Let's take a look at a couple examples:

Hank marries a woman from another country. She's bilingual, so the two have no trouble conversing, but it's difficult to communicate with her family when she's there to translate and impossible when she's not. Hank's wife suggests that she could help him to learn her language, but Hank's response is, "I can't." He doesn't have any learning disabilities which would actually preclude him from being able to learn the language; the truth is that Hank just doesn't want to take on something so difficult and so uses "I can't," as an excuse to avoid having to try.

Pam has been working at a coffee shop for years now and, although she's the most experienced barista there, she is still on the lowest level. She is one day approached by her boss, a girl half her age, who asks why she doesn't put in for a promotion. Although Pam has the experience, she doesn't believe in herself enough to imagine that she could be a manager. Pam turns her boss down and another barista is promoted in her place.

In the first example, Hank replaces the truthful phrase, "I don't want to, it seems too difficult," for an excuse as to why he won't try. With Pam, she simply doesn't believe in herself enough to allow herself to progress. The funny thing is that both of their lives could have been improved if they had deigned to give it a shot.

When Jimi Hendrix, one of the most virtuosic guitar players ever to have lived, first had a chance to pick up a guitar, do you think that he looked to his favorite musicians and gave up, saying, "I can't?" If he had, we never would have heard his name. We don't all start out experts, it takes time and effort. However, by trusting yourself to try, you may just be surprised at how many talents you do have and can develop.

Exercise 24:

The next time there is something that you'd really like to do, or something that you are asked to do and feel the phrase, "I can't" creeping to your mind, take a minute to investigate.

Ask yourself, "Is it possible?" "Do I have the skills now to do this?" If not, "What would it take for me to acquire them?" "Is this something that would violate my ethics?"

If something is possible and wouldn't go against your ethics, but you don't presently have the skills to make a go of it, let the person know exactly that.

If it's something that you do want to do, or something that will be required of you, take the necessary steps to obtain the skills or knowledge required to move forward.

If it's something that you don't want to do and won't be required of you, then be honest.

In your daily life, replace "I can't" with "I can't yet."

How does this apply to giving up excuses?

By trusting yourself, you open the door to the ability to make improvements to your life and learn the things that you want or need to learn. Excuses aren't necessary when you're doing what you need to be doing, or at least putting forth the effort.

Learn How to Deal with Failure

Sometimes we just make mistakes. We're human, it happens. What's important is to learn from this failure. When we make excuses, we are only stopping ourselves from acquiring something from the failure. By excusing our failures, we are telling ourselves and others that we didn't actually make a mistake; we were just put in an impossible situation. And if we don't believe that we made a mistake, why should we bother to learn anything from it?

The fact is that failure is common. So common in fact that even the most successful people in the world will tell you that they've made more mistakes than they'd care to admit. Often, the most difficult part of failure, even more so than the consequences of that failure,

is accepting that we have failed and not letting it kill our motivation to improve.

Failure doesn't necessarily mean that what we've done isn't good enough. In some instances, it's about how and to whom we put forth our effort that can be the difference. For instance, a person could be a world-class writer in the thriller genre, but she's not going to get a book deal by sending her manuscript to a publisher who works primarily with children's books. A person may have the greatest invention in the world, but he's not going to find success marketing it to people who have no use for it. Relationships happen all of the time where two people really want to make it work, but they're too different, or have lost the ability to connect.

One of the most common mistakes when dealing with a failure is to have great hindsight, but little to no foresight. This can be illustrated in a situation where a person says the infamous phrase, "If I had it to do all over again, I would have done it different," but when an opportunity arises to make the proper changes to their approach, the person will either make the same mistakes, or just not try.

The first thing to do for failure is to accept that it's happened. Denial spares feelings for a little bit, but when the truth finally hits, it hits a lot harder than it would otherwise have done. In cases where the denial never abates, this turns into something called delusion.

So, what can we do to better accept failure?

Exercise 25:

When a failure occurs in your life take your journal and write down exactly what happened.

Write the process of the failed act and what went wrong.

Write out possible solutions to these problems, things that may have made the effort a success. Repeat this as often as you can as further failures arise.

The next time that you're confronted with a situation which has

a lot riding on it, whether at work or at home, reference these past experiences and try to plan for possible pitfalls that may enter into the process, and introduce a new plan of action.

The most important thing to do with failure is to learn from it. Rather than making the same mistakes or falling into self-pity/loathing, make every effort to realize exactly what went wrong and what could have made it better. The more that we learn from our failures, the less often failures will arise. When they do, we'll be much more equipped to deal with them.

How does this apply to giving up complaining?

Complaining is often the result of a failure or inadequacy on our part. When we learn from our failures, we take an active role in the process of betterment instead of excusing it and trying to make the failure itself the thing to be strived after. By excusing our failures, we make them somehow okay and not our fault. Therefore, we are much more liable to fail more often and, in order to perpetuate this process, making more excuses.

Give Up Attachment

The type of attachment referenced in the title for this chapter is attachment that holds us back, not attachment that enhances our lives. Romantic attachment, attachment to kids, family and friends are all very important things to have which make our lives better.

But there are so many things that we hold above all else which really have no relevance to our lives anymore. Lessons can be learned from the past, and emotions can give us insight into who we are and what we want, but when too much emphasis is placed on these things, we've put yet another road block on our way toward happiness.

Give up the Past

Every day we think about the past. We talk about it, base our days off of it. In fact, it's because of the past and our attachment to it that we continue to do the things that we do. There is nothing stopping us from waking up tomorrow and changing our entire world. The problem is, we're all very attached to the past.

There are positive things that we can learn and good reasons to look to the past for guidance, however, we often use the past as an excuse or a barrier toward our present and our future.

The past can't be changed as far as what happened event-wise, but what can be changed is our relationship to it. Rather than let the past blindly dictate our future, why not move forward and be who and what we want now ?

We often operate exclusively based off of our past experiences. Don't believe me? Let's see a couple of examples.

Mike has been in a number of relationships throughout the years, but most of the women he has dated have turned out to be manipulative, unhealthy people. One night, he goes to a bar with some friends and one of his buddies offers to hook Mike up with his sister's friend. This buddy tells Mike that this woman has all of the same interests that he does, is attractive and intelligent, to

wit, she is everything that Mike is looking for in a partner. Mike is about ready to give his friend the go-ahead, but the past quickly storms in. Within a few seconds, Mike is convinced that while this woman may look good on paper, she'll just end up being like all of his other girlfriends. He misses out on a wonderful opportunity to date a lovely young woman.

Joan has been a manager for a few years now and she's had the chance to work with many people during this time. She has learned everyone's strengths and weaknesses, or at least, she's learned by what they have done in the past. There is an individual who has put in for a promotion and, although this person looks excellent on their application, she can't help but remember a Christmas party a few years ago where this person had a little bit too much to drink and made a fool of himself singing karaoke. Although this doesn't affect this person's work in the slightest, Joan can't get that image of him out of her head. The employee talks to her one day, saying that if he were to be promoted, he would implement a new structure of production that would save the company money and increase productivity, but Joan is quick to say, "I'm sorry, you didn't get it." The individual becomes fed up with his inability to grow within the company and starts working for a competitor. He quickly rises to management and implements his new structure. The other company makes a killing and Joan's company takes a huge hit in the market.

When we hang onto our past, we start to make sweeping blanket judgments. "If things were this way in the past, they will be the same way in the future." It's with this philosophy that we find Mike from our first example here. The fact of the matter is that not every person that Mike could come across of the opposite sex will be a doppelganger to his bad relationship experiences of the past. The truth is that everybody's different, but a person who's living in the past will find it quite difficult to see this.

Our attachment to the past doesn't always have anything specifically to do with us, as is seen in the second example, but how we use the information from the past absolutely does. In Joan's case, her employee was poised to make her company much more

competitive in the marketplace, but because she couldn't move past a silly, one night humiliation of that person, she lost a valuable employee.

We can't forget our pasts completely, nor should we. There are many things that the past has for us that will make our futures a much easier proposition. However, it's when we place too much stock in these past experiences and not enough in trying new things that we're missing out on a lot of opportunities for happiness.

Exercise 26:

Try something new every day.

This is the simplest exercise in the book. By trying something new every day, you're placing yourself in the present. By keeping your life a cornucopia of new experiences, you'll find that you learn more about the things with which you are already familiar than you ever would have if you had simply proceeded upon older patterns.

How does this apply to giving up attachment?

The past, put simply, is attachment. There are always parts of our past experience that we'll draw upon to make choices for our futures. This isn't inherently bad, as learning from past failures can give us insight into what to avoid and how to improve. However, it's when we hold such a firm attachment to our pasts, it becomes difficult to allow ourselves to learn and grow every day, and our lives become boring, predictable and stagnant.

The past can lead us to make the same mistakes again if we're not careful. Learn from the past, but don't be a slave to it.

Giving up Attachment to Emotions

Happiness itself is an emotion, therefore, why would we want to give up our attachment to emotions in general? Notice that this section is not entitled, "Give up Emotions." To do so would be to give up what makes us human and what gives meaning in our lives. It's the attachment that we have to these emotions that is so

important to give up.

We seek out the kind of relationships that we do because of how these relationships make us feel, whether it's good or bad. It's the attachment to emotion that drives a person to go back to unhealthy relationships again and again. When we lead an unconscious life, we often repeat patterns whether they're actually beneficial to us or not.

The key here is to create a new understanding of ourselves and how our emotions drive us to do the things that we do. There is always an emotional payoff. The person who writes all the time does so because it gives them an emotional reward, that of accomplishment. The person who drinks all the time also does so because it gives them an emotional reward. The reasons for the latter are varied, but often have something to do with avoiding unpleasant emotions, or a level of rational thought which would otherwise be present (although this is far from a comprehensive list.)

When we do things based on our emotions, we have a tendency to become bound by them. Even things which elicit positive emotions can turn out to be negative. If we overdo something because it gives us a good feeling, we run the risk of missing out on the rest of our lives. That's not even beginning to talk about the negative things which can cause (temporary) positive emotional states, such as drugs, etc.

The fact of the matter is that when we're overcome with an emotion, or overcome with our attachment to an emotion, we have ceased to think clearly. We may, for a time, find utility by "going with the gut," but this has a tendency to backfire. It's much better to go with our heads.

So, with emotion pervading every aspect of our lives, what can we do to live a more thoughtful and conscious life with our emotions, rather than for or against them?

Exercise 27:

Write out the ways in which you perpetuate a negative situation

because of the emotions that you have about it.

Write down why you think it's useful to seek out this emotional context.

Ask yourself: "Is this what I really want my life to be?"

If the answer is yes, you're on your own, and I wish you the best of luck in your situation.

If the answer is no, write out what you can do to make a change in this situation, and a plan to deal with whatever negative emotions may arise from this extrication.

Take special note of any thoughts which may crop up due to the upcoming planned change.

When the time comes, follow your plan to the letter and don't let your emotions dissuade you.

Repeat as needed.

We have a choice whether or not to take an active part in how emotion shapes our lives. When we take controls of our actions and reactions in regard to emotion, we are more able to find what we really want and not hold onto a situation which has stopped being fruitful for the sake of emotional reminiscence.

How does this apply to giving up attachment?

Our emotions are what we are most attached to in the first place. Would we be so attached to another person if we didn't have a certain emotion tied to that person? Would we hang onto items from loved ones if it weren't for the emotional charge that's attached to it?

By giving up attachment to emotion, we're not giving up the emotion itself. Every emotion has its place and purpose in our lives, but when we become attached to these emotions, more often than not, we're led in a direction away from what we really want out of life. Therefore, enjoy your emotions, and let them work with you instead of against you.

Give Up Procrastination

Our lives are busier than they ever have been. Our jobs are more demanding and our time is extremely precious. It's very tempting to forego some of the things that we need to do in order to try and squeeze in something that we want to do. The problem is that we can't get any of the time that we waste back.

If you've found yourself constantly bumping against deadlines, having to let things go for the fact that there just isn't the time or even if you're simply wanting to add to the spare time that you already have, this chapter is for you.

Time Management and Productivity

I know we've all heard about time management, but what does it actually mean? Time management is basically a way of partitioning your time to accommodate all of the parts of your busy life.

In the spirit of this chapter, let's not waste any time going through loads of examples and explanations and let's get straight to the heart of the matter: How to better manage your time to increase your productivity.

Exercise 28:

Print some copies of the schedule on the next page.

Make a list of your daily tasks on a separate piece of paper.

Estimate how long each task will take.

Fill this schedule with your daily tasks.

Give yourself a five to ten minute break between tasks on the schedule (this helps avoid burnout.)

Plan for everything, including downtime. No need to be too specific, even the words "Free Time" or abbreviation "FT" are acceptable.

Set a timer when you begin a task and take note of how long it takes you to complete it working straight through.

Adjust your schedule to match.

Keep to your schedule.

How does this apply to giving up procrastination?

By making and sticking to a schedule, it becomes much easier to plan your time and be motivated to stay on track. It's best to take your daily schedule with you, or have it close at hand so that you can reference it as needed. Setting a timer is one more motivating factor, and will help to keep you on task. Make this fun, set rewards for yourself if you finish early, or try to outdo your best time for a particular item.

You'll find that the less you procrastinate, the more free-time you have to do all of the things that you want to do, and you won't have to worry about the added stress of falling behind.

Give Up Holding Grudges

One of the most destructive things that we do is something that doesn't necessarily start with us. When we hold a grudge, it's because someone has done something to hurt or disappoint us. The problem is, the longer we hold this grudge, the more it hurts us and only us.

If there is a person who has done wrong to you and you find yourself having trouble letting it go, it's time for some introspection. Granted, you may not trust a particular person again, or trust may need to be earned again, however, by swallowing and digesting a grudge indefinitely, you're putting a poison into your body because someone else did you wrong. They're not the ones who really pay for it. You are.

Learn How to Deal with Conflict

If you have any interaction with anyone in the world ever, there are going to be disagreements, misunderstandings and often flat-out arguments. What's the best way to deal with these things so they don't escalate and turn into a long and damaging grudge?

The truth is that you can't win an argument. Even if you're right, by arguing, you put the other person on the defensive, and a defensive person isn't likely to really listen to what you have to say. There are a few simple tricks to learning how to deal with conflict.

Empathy: We've all been wrong, and we've all made mistakes. How do you know that you would have done things differently if you were in another person's shoes? If a person has so egregiously hurt you, then the simple fact is that you have the choice to allow them to stay in your life or not. Holding a grudge doesn't help anyone.

Air your grievances in a calm, mature manner: When you approach someone with understanding and thoughtfulness, even if you have differing opinions, you're much more likely to work through it without anyone getting hurt if you talk about it

rationally with one another.

Agree to disagree: Sometimes, no matter how right you may be (or think you may be) you may never see eye-to-eye on an issue. In this case, by agreeing to disagree you avoid a long-term conflict that can turn into a grudge match.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples of conflicts and use the tools above to bring them to a happier conclusion:

Jake and Jack have been at odds for as long as they can remember. It doesn't help that they're brothers and can't really write one another off. It's difficult for the two to remember exactly how the conflict occurred, but they are both pretty certain that it's the other one's fault. Finally, having had enough of the bad blood, Jack takes his brother aside one day and asks if they can have a peaceful talk. Jake is already ready for a fight, but as Jack keeps his cool and speaks in a calm and controlled manner, tempers eventually die down and the two are able to bury their grudges and move forward as brothers.

Melanie and Sophia are both interested in the same position at work. The two of them have long been rivals as they went to the same college, received similar grades and began work at this company around the same time. Melanie starts to slander Sophia to their boss and it's not long before Sophia is brought in for a talk. The two of them are in the office together and rather than allow herself to fly off the handle, Sophia thinks about how much she wants this job herself and it's easy for her to imagine why Melanie would want to push her out of the way. The two have an open and honest discussion with their boss playing mediator. Due to Sophia's honesty and empathy, Melanie eventually comes clean about what she had said. Melanie does get a stern warning from the boss about acting the way she had, but the two leave on amicable terms. When Sophia gets the promotion, Melanie congratulates her, and the two have made a huge step toward resolving their rivalry.

Disagreements don't always end in smiles and sunshine, but by using these simple techniques, they don't have to spiral out of control.

Exercise 29:

Write a letter to someone toward whom you have a grudge.

In the beginning of the letter, get out all of your anger, pain and/or frustration. Be as brutal as you like.

In the middle part of your letter, write out the things that you've done, said or thought that were hurtful or potentially hurtful to the other person.

The last part of the letter is all about understanding. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and, even if you know that you wouldn't have done what they have done, make it a point to detail how holding this grudge has hurt you by keeping a hold of it.

Finish the letter off with the words, "I don't need this grudge anymore. It's over."

DO NOT SEND THIS LETTER!

The above exercise is a valuable way to unburden without hurting another. By letting your feelings out, you gain catharsis. A grudge in itself is a burden, and by using these tools, even if you don't agree with what the person said or did any more than when you started, at least you will have stopped carrying that extra load.

How does this apply to giving up grudges?

By learning how to better resolve conflict, grudges become an unnecessary thing which can be cast aside. Conflict is a part of life, but when we hold onto their effects, we are only hurting ourselves. Let the pain go. You're worth it.

Give Up The Unhealthy Body

In our fast paced world, we want everything to be as fast as we feel that we have to be. That includes our food. If fast-food restaurants served healthy food, there wouldn't be a problem. However, I think we all know that this isn't the case.

When the food we eat is created not for its nutritional value, but the speed of preparation and its addictive properties, all sorts of disturbing corners are cut. This "food" is cooked, literally, in fat and oil; cooked items are kept warm under a heat-lamp or, in many cases, in heated drawers, and even if they did once contain some nutritional value, it's been processed right out of them. These items are loaded with fat, salt and sugar and. Why so much sugar and salt? These two things are extremely addictive; in fact, it's been postulated by various health organizations that sugar and salt are some of the most addictive substance on the planet.

So, what can we do to put down the burger and get healthy?

Create a Balanced Diet Based on Your Body's Needs

Our bodies need water, vitamins, minerals and general nutrition not just to keep us alive, but healthy as well. When we eat healthy we have more energy, are less prone to illness and generally feel much better than when we shovel in the junk.

Water is the most important thing that we put in our bodies. Our bodies are mostly water, and this life-giving fluid keeps every one of the delicate processes of our bodies running smoothly. It helps to flush out toxins from our food and our environment, it helps to deliver nutrients to all of the cells in our bodies and it even helps to boost the immune system.

The standard recommended amount of water is about three liters of water per day for men and a little over two liters per day for women. This isn't a hard and fast rule, however, as levels of exercise, warmth of the climate or illness can affect the necessary levels to keep your body running at its best.

Discussing the proper amount of water and the right diet for your body with a physician or dietician is your best bet. These people are trained in finding out the nutritional needs of their patients, and they can help you find what works best for you.

Our bodies have various ways of flushing out toxins, but when we're overloaded with bad food, even these processes aren't enough to keep up with the damage that we're doing. Many diseases can be treated (some cured) through the adoption of a healthier, more nutritious diet. Consult your local health professional for what changes may be right for you.

Exercise 30:

Start by creating a food journal, detailing what you eat and drink throughout your week.

If your water intake is lower than recommended, start by adding one cup's worth every day until you're at the proper level.

Add a vegetable to every meal. Some vegetables are better for you than others; a bit of quick research can lead you in the best direction for your body's needs.

After you've grown accustomed to adding a proper vegetable to your meal, it's time to start taking away the bad stuff. On your second week, cut your fast-food/junk food by half. The next week, half it again. On the fourth week, cut it out of your diet entirely with the occasional (once a month or so)

For every unhealthy item that you remove from your diet, add in a healthy replacement.

Continue this process until you have reached the best diet for your body.

This exercise is by no means intended to supersede the advice of your doctor or dietician. It is merely intended to give you a workable plan toward replacing the unhealthy parts of your diet with good, nutrition-rich food.

How does this apply to giving up an unhealthy body?

By eating right and gaining the proper nutrition and water intake, we are able to fuel our bodies without poisoning it in the process. Make no mistake, unhealthy food is poison. It may not kill as quickly as strychnine, but it can lead to heart-attack, stroke, obesity, kidney and liver problems and even death.

Nothing replaces the advice of a competent health professional.

Exercise for Health

One of the biggest problems with regard to our health is a lack of exercise. Technology has made it simple to almost completely avoid any sort of energy expenditure, and this has had a grave toll on the public health.

Exercise boosts the immune system, helps to burn off excess calories, build muscle while burning off fat, help circulation, encourage mental awareness and development, it gives an increased ability to focus and a seemingly endless list of other benefits. The problem is, it's so easy nowadays to just sit back and ignore our body's health.

Another thing that comes with our technology is an increased want or need to be "wired in" most of the time. Our world has moved from one of a physically active society to a more predominantly mentally active society. That in and of itself isn't necessarily a bad thing, but the problem is that many of us have almost cut physical activity out of the equation entirely.

Many people find that it's easy to start exercising, but much more difficult to stay with it. This requires setting and sticking with an exercise regimen. Some of you might say that you don't have the time to exercise. The truth is that there is as much time available as we are willing to set aside. An exercise program doesn't need to take hours in order to be effective, in fact, many very effective exercise regimens are known for their relative speed and ease.

Before beginning an exercise regimen, talk to your doctor.

Especially when you're starting from a state of inactivity or low activity, it can be extremely dangerous to jump right into a moderate or hardcore regimen. What defines your needed level of exercise is your body's present state. A marathon runner would find it a step back to run five miles a week, but a couch potato may have some serious health concerns if they were to jump into the same schedule. Again, a doctor's advice is paramount when considering a new exercise regimen. With that in mind, and because everybody needs something different from an exercise program, this chapter's exercise on exercise will be tips to keep yourself motivated toward your goal.

Exercise 31:

Start out slow and follow your doctor's instructions to the letter.

Make a scheduled time every day where you can dedicate yourself to exercising. Even if it's only for fifteen or twenty minutes.

If part of your daily routine is watching television, use commercial breaks as a time to do a few quick pushups, sit-ups, squats or to just move around.

Join an exercise group or invite friends and family to join you on a jog, or at the gym, etc. When two or more people are involved, it becomes a lot easier to stay motivated.

Make it fun. Do something that you enjoy for your exercise. If you like music, take an mp3 player with you to the gym or on your next run. If you like nature, start scheduling or participating in nature-hikes. If you are a gamer, stand and do leg exercises while you play your game. There is any number of things that you can do to incorporate your interests into your exercise.

The point isn't to make it difficult; the point is to make it something that you'll come back to. Exercise is itself a form of work, but when you make it enjoyable for yourself, not only do you get the health benefits, but you also have a wonderful new hobby.

How does this apply to giving up the unhealthy body?

Exercise, especially in conjunction with a healthy and balanced diet, builds muscles, makes the body more efficient and more capable of dealing with illness, helps to increase circulation, provides a better flow of oxygen through your bloodstream and helps build intelligence. The health benefits to a safe and steady exercise plan are far too immense to detail in full here, but with a healthy body comes a healthy mind. With a healthy mind comes a happier, more empowering existence.

Give Up Excessive and Impulsive Spending

Debt is one of the leading causes for stress, and for good reason. AARP estimates that approximately seventy-percent of American consumers are in debt. Many of these people are actually losing money every month rather than acquiring it, making their debt grow larger rather than shrink.

Economics is one of the most troubling things in our modern world. It seems that nobody (least of all, governments) know how to hold onto money, much less add to their own wealth. But it's not the concern of this book to focus on governments or corporations as a whole, etc. The focus of this book is on you.

So, how can you make better financial decisions and hopefully crawl out of the money pit?

Creating a Personal Budget

Now there's a word that often sends people away screaming. To budget is to set aside money, to plan for what to do with your money and to make safety nets for times when things are a bit tighter. The process of sticking to a personal budget can have its difficulties, but the principle couldn't be simpler.

When creating a budget, there are a few things which are commonly overlooked: Food and drink (especially regarding restaurants, etc.), entertainment, vehicle and home maintenance, pet care, parking, prescriptions, memberships at gyms or other places/services which charge monthly and taxes (non-sales taxes) are just a very few. When making a budget, it's important to account for everything. I mean everything.

A good way to keep track of what you're spending is to keep a check register handy (whether you use checks or not.) By doing this, you can keep a running total of your expenses and your deposits as the purchases are being made. It's important to remember that banks sometimes take a couple of days to post

everything except for withdrawals or deposits made in cash or by wire-transfer; therefore, having a check register handy with your current actual funds can make the difference between a positive balance and a ridiculously high set of overdraft fees.

The two major components of any budget are your income and your expenditure. Income is the absolute last bastion of numbers that you do not want to cross when making a purchase unless you have saved up the money already, or you are buying a home or car and financing is absolutely necessary (which, even in these cases it isn't always.) Going into debt over a new television, however, probably isn't the best plan in the world.

Due to the variety of things which would make up a personal budget, I'll forego making a table or list of possible expenditures for this exercise, however, it is important to keep an eye on what these expenditures are for you.

Exercise 32:

On top of making a list of all of your normal monthly expenses (rent/mortgage, car payment, various types of insurance, etc.) keep track of your other expenditures throughout a given month.

Divide these expenses into a more manageable group of expenses, such as groceries, entertainment, transportation costs including gas money, etc.

Write out the amount that you spent in each one of these areas and get a total of all expenses.

Compare this to your monthly income.

Always try to save at least 10% of your pretax income where possible. Add this saving into your budget as an expense as this is money that's coming out of your immediate income.

Look for areas with higher expenditure than is needed and make a concerted plan to reduce your purchases and expenses in this area. (Don't be too rough with it, people need to have some fun, but there's nothing fun about having a car repossessed.)

A budget is worthless if you don't stick to it. Therefore, it's not a bad idea to set up a reward budget. I know it may sound silly, but if you set aside a little bit of money with every paycheck to reward yourself for sticking to your budget, you may find that you're a lot more motivated to do just that. And should you go over your budget, you'll have a little extra to put toward your expenses without having to dip into your savings.

What does this have to do with giving up wasteful spending?

By creating and sticking to a budget, you make a great stride toward financial independence. Wasteful spending creates debt and debt is the opposite of independence. You work hard for your money, you should be able to keep as much of it as possible, but when you fail to make a budget, you are inviting financial disaster.

Investing and Saving for Retirement

When I was a kid, I heard that the age of retirement was sixty-five. As I've grown, I don't think that I've seen a dozen people who were actually retired by this age. Something like six-percent of Americans who are sixty-five and older don't have to rely on some external source of income during retirement. Many people continue to work until they physically can't anymore. If this was for the love of the job, it would be one thing, but not being able to survive without working through retirement is a startling idea.

Investments are a wonderful option, however, many people shy away from investing because they are afraid of losing what they have with the wild fluctuations in the stock market. Investing in stocks is not necessarily your best and is certainly not your only option as far as investments go.

Such items as IRAs (Individual Retirement Account), 401k, insured bonds and CDs (Certificates of Deposit) are things in which you can start investing now and come with little risk of return. These options do have much lower payouts possible than the volatile stock market, but a steady return of 2% on your investment is 2% more than you had before.

The thing to keep an eye on with these options is that, as a general rule, there is a penalty or fee for withdrawing your funds before they've reached their "maturity" date. The amount of this fee varies between the type of investment and the company or agency through which you have the investment, but with a secured, insured investment, you have a great potential to make some progress toward retiring and actually being retired.

Bankers and brokers can be a great help in finding what investment is right for you.

Exercise 33:

Using the budget set forth in the previous exercise, see if there's an amount of money that you can put aside for long-term, low-risk investment.

Talk to a banker or a broker about your options and how much of an initial investment would be necessary to get things going.

Ask plenty of questions, such as: "How long does this fund take to mature?" "What kind of interest rate is available through these options and how is it calculated?" "What is the risk involved in this investment?" and, "Is my principle (initial investment) insured with this kind of investment?" to name a few.

Discuss these options with your significant other, or someone in whom you have a good deal of trust and learn from their insight.

Choose an investment plan with all of the possible knowledge that you can acquire, and keep your hands off of this money until it reaches maturity. Otherwise, you may face steep fees/penalties.

How does this relate to giving up excessive spending?

By making a plan for the future, you are taking steps to ensure that you don't spend yourself into a hole. By saving up and making smart investments with your money, you are taking control over your financial future.

Give Up Loneliness

Loneliness is, quite simply, the state of having removed one's self from meaningful contact with others. It's not just a matter of actually being alone. Many celebrities have said that the loneliest they feel is when they're surrounded by a thousand adoring fans. How could this possibly be?

We become lonely when we feel like we are unwanted, not understood or not appreciated. This is a sad and solitary place to be, but there are ways to overcome loneliness.

Learn to Live More Spontaneously

By getting out of our ruts, we allow ourselves to open up to new opportunities and adventures. There are all sorts of ways to overcome your loneliness through spontaneity. Take something that interests you and look for a group that centers on it.

If you're an avid reader, join a book club. You'll be able to do something that you love and enjoy the companionship of people with similar interests. Have you always wanted to try your hand at being a chef? Look into a cooking group. You may not end up as the next Gordon Ramsay, however, this is a great way to meet people and hone a wonderful skill.

When we break out of our shells, we find that opening up has many rewards. By going out and being receptive to others and the opportunities available to you, you may just find that you've come through the experience with a few new friends as a bonus.

When we isolate ourselves, it's easy to feel like we would never be able to fit in with other people. The fact of the matter is that we're all much more alike than we are different. Even "uncommon" interests have a large number of adherents, so the fact of the matter is that there's no reason to be lonely, unless you so choose.

The simplest, and often most overlooked way of overcoming loneliness is to just put yourself out there and look for new friends.

Going out with your present friends, or with family members can be a nice way to ease into forming a larger social circle. Strike up a conversation at the office, invite your friends or family over for a party at your place and tell them to bring a friend. There are many ways to overcome loneliness and, while you may not find your best friend every time you leave the house, you're opening up to new and fulfilling relationships.

Exercise 34:

Stop by your local university's campus (or their website) and inquire about what classes are open in a field that interests you for the coming semester.

They will usually give you a list of classes, or a link where you can find out registration information for classes.

Pick one class that you think would be interesting, but not so intensive that you wouldn't be able to interact with your classmates. (Don't worry about any possible age difference. More and more classes nowadays are filled with people of various ages and backgrounds.)

Go to class and participate.

Suggest forming a study group with some of the students in the class, should the subject lend itself to such things.

Be willing to meet new people and open your mind to making new friends.

There are a million ways to be more spontaneous; it's just a matter of being willing to put yourself out there.

How does this relate to giving up loneliness?

By giving ourselves permission to be spontaneous, we open ourselves to a world of potential friends. Our lives aren't as set in stone as we may think. In fact, taking on a new and unique challenge is one of the best ways to feel alive no matter what your age. Who has time to be lonely when you're meeting new people and learning something new?

How to Build a Support System

When I first heard the term support system in this context, I was much younger and I thought that I would never need such a thing. However, when things go bad, or you're left with the feeling that nobody understands you, a good support system can be a lifesaver, figuratively and, in some cases, literally.

A support system is a group of trusted friends and/or family members who you can call upon when you need encouragement or advice. It's first necessary to cultivate these relationships and be willing to be a part of a friend's support system as well. I've heard very few people refer to this by name, but I've seen very many people call upon others in their time of need.

Building strong and lasting relationships requires care, attention and a genuine interest in the welfare of each other. Whether you're spending time leisurely with one another or tackling some life issues, being there for your friends and family is the best way to know that you'll have someone there for you as well when times are tough.

Let's take a quick look at a couple of examples of situations where a support system would be helpful.

Micah is a bit of a loner. He's always passed this off as his refusal to bow to societal pressures, but the fact of the matter is that he's not very good with people. He lives his life in a mostly solitary way until one day his father dies. Micah and his father had always been very close. In fact, his father is the only person that Micah had been very close to throughout his life. Micah is torn apart by grief, but there's no one around to talk to.

In this situation, although Micah doesn't have a support system in place at the moment, there are ways that he could reach out to others for help. For instance, there are support groups that focus on grief, along with all sorts of other things.

Let's take a look at another example.

Joanie has a lot of acquaintances, but very few close friends. She is a social butterfly, but doesn't really have any deep

connections. When Joanie goes home, she doesn't have anyone to talk to; the most she can hope for is for the next call to come in, inviting her to some crazy party. One night, on her way home from yet another party, Joanie is mugged by a masked man who threatens her life. Joanie makes it through the situation physically unscathed, but mentally and emotionally wrecked. She tries to think of one of her multitudinous friends that she could call to talk with, but can't think of anyone with whom she'd feel comfortable sharing something so involved.

In this example, we can see how having a lot of contacts in one's life doesn't necessarily denote having friends. Friendship is something that is deeper than the superficial and is one of the greatest treasures on the planet. There is hope for Joanie, however. She can start to reach out to her present friends and find out with whom she can forge a closer bond. There is also therapy which can give some of the best understanding that a person can find outside of a close and intimate relationship.

Exercise 35:

Make a list of the people who comprise your support group.

If you do not have a person or group of people with whom you presently feel comfortable enough sharing things, look at the people who are in your life and ask yourself what it would take for your relationship with them to become a closer one.

Give them each a call, write them a letter, send them an email or tell them to their face how much you appreciate them for who they are and what they do to help you throughout your life.

Ask them if there's anything that you can do to help them.

Listen and be open to giving advice that, to the best of your ability, will help them know that they are not alone.

Remember the simple fact that we are the least alone when we reach out to help someone else.

How does this apply to giving up loneliness?

By building and maintaining a support system, there's always someone there to help you when times are tough. Loneliness is an unnecessary thing in your life when you surround yourself with healthy, open relationships. Invite camaraderie into your life and know that you never need to be lonely.

Give Up Negativity

The need to give up negativity in order to be happy seems elementary; but you may be surprised at how many people refuse to do it. Many of us have been surrounded by negativity throughout most of our lives and have developed at least some negative perspectives. Negativity destroys confidence in ourselves, others, leads to a lack of trust and can obliterate an otherwise healthy relationship.

So, what can we do to give up negativity?

Affect a Positive Approach

Being positive isn't always easy. Sometimes, it's downright hard. But when we affect a positive outlook we are much more capable of dealing with all of life's situations in a healthy way. Negativity shuts us down. It encourages us to make snap judgments against others, against ourselves and against our lives.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples of how negativity can get in the way of our goals, and what we can do to make a positive change.

Brody is an athlete. He has been participating in team sports and solo sports since he was a kid, but his favorite thing to do by far is to run track. Brody has an exceptional talent, but he has a tendency to be very negative toward himself. He is offered the chance to try out for the Olympic track team, but doesn't believe that he could possibly compete at such a higher level. Even though he has run races in the past which have approached world record times, he has the thought set in his head that he wouldn't be able to make the Olympic team, much less perform well in the games themselves. Therefore, he declines the chance to try out. He runs many amateur races that year with faster times than those of the Olympians.

Brenda is not what you would call a go-getter when it comes to work. Her negative attitude has begun to affect other people, and

she's unwilling to change the problem. She's always unhappy and can find fault with anything and everything, and she makes a point of letting people know this fact regularly. She is on a team at work that handles a particularly intricate matter of business, but this doesn't begin to stop Brenda's negativity from infecting her coworkers. This behavior is finally confronted by Brenda's boss. He calls her into the office and says, "I'm starting to wonder if you're really happy here, Brenda." The conversation goes on and Brenda's negativity only increases. Her boss eventually lets her go.

In these situations, there are a few simple things that could have been done to create a better ending. If Brody would have suspended his negativity and simply tried out for the Olympic team, he would have made it easily, but the fact that he didn't try at all prevented him from a potentially incredible experience.

Brenda's negativity seeped through so much that she eventually got fired because of its infectious effect on her coworkers and her work as a whole. If Brenda would have used some positive exercises or attitudes, this whole situation could have been avoided.

What can we do in our own lives to create positivity and destroy negativity?

Exercise 36:

Write down some positive affirmations and post them up in various places throughout your home and office (where possible.) These can include things such as, "I am intelligent," "I am capable," "I am beautiful/handsome," "I am valuable," etc.

Be conscious of the times when negativity creeps up inside of you and practice stopping that negativity before it takes hold.

Replace your negative phrases with a positive phrase. Example: Rather than saying, "I can't do that," try, "I bet I can do that if I try," etc.

When others around you are being openly negative, try to inject a positive alternative to their bleak outlook.

Fake it 'til you make it. If you are having a difficult time cutting out the negative thoughts, at least replace them with positive words and actions. By doing this, you will encourage your mind to make the change.

How does this apply to giving up negativity?

Being, thinking, acting and talking positive makes it possible for you to not only overcome negativity, but inject a better perspective into your life. When all that you think is negative, all that you experience will be negative as well. If you think positively, even when things do go awry, you will be much more capable of handling it.

Building Mental Strength and Fortitude

Have you ever been by a gym and seen the people with the enormous, rippling muscles, easily lifting things that feel like they're going to give you a hernia just by looking at them? Or seen the others who can run faster and farther on a treadmill in an hour than you did during your entire PE career combined? These people have taken their health seriously enough to do something about it. Why can't the rest of us do the same in regard to our thoughts, feelings and actions?

Mental strength is by no means invincibility. If you were to punch the strongest man in the world, it would still cause him pain; however, by building up his strength, I bet it's not going to do nearly as much damage as if you were to hit someone who didn't take care of their bodies at all. Now, obviously I'm not telling you to go out there and start hitting people. The point is that by building up our mental strength, we become more capable of coping when things don't go the way that we would like, or can remain uninjured when someone sees fit to attack us.

There are many ways to increase your mental fortitude. By trying to understand why someone is being rude or downright mean to you, you can make your feelings more rational. It's normal to be hurt when someone is putting you down, however, by realizing that it's not really as simple as "I'm bad," or "I'm not enough," you can put these events into perspective.

It's important to grow from emotional pain. Avoidance only postpones the inevitable and doesn't do anything to help your mental strength or fortitude. Therefore, confront difficult situations head on. Be calm, be rational, be you.

After a particularly emotional event, keep track of your actions and whether you're facing the problems or attempting to avoid them. You can accomplish this by simply asking yourself, "Would I be doing this right now if it wasn't for _____?" Whatever the situation may be, by pulling yourself back into the mode of solving the problem rather than reveling in it or avoiding it, you gain mental maturity, fortitude and strength for the future.

When we don't bother to face our problems, whether by actively avoiding them or trying to pretend like they don't exist/don't hurt, we circumvent our ability to learn from pain, and pain can be one of the best teachers in the world.

Exercise 37:

The next time that you find yourself confronted by a situation where you are undergoing a good deal of emotional distress, start by investigating your feelings. Why do you feel the way that you feel in regard to the situation? What is actually happening that is causing this emotional pain? What can you do to move through it? Etc.

Sometimes things take time to get past, but even things which are more serious are resolved when we pay the proper attention to them in a productive, rational manner. Therefore, confront your problems head on.

Stand in the way of your own distractions. Rather than have that big drink because you've had a bad day, or bury yourself in a videogame, do something actively to resolve the issue. Even if there's nothing you can do to change the situation, there's still something that you can do to augment your reaction to it.

Be good to yourself. Many people get frustrated or angry with themselves when they undergo emotional strain because they're under the faulty assumption that being emotional equates to being weak. This is simply not the case. In fact, the healthiest

people in the world have active emotional lives, they're just not controlled by their emotions to the point that they don't deal with their problems.

Smile. Believe it or not, even the simple act of smiling can help to boost your mental fortitude. Things may be rough from time to time, but that doesn't mean that hope is gone.

How does this relate to giving up negativity?

By learning to improve your mental fortitude, you make yourself more capable of dealing with negative emotions, and there is no reason to become overly negative. Bad things happen; it's what we do when they happen that makes all of the difference. By increasing your mental strength and fortitude, you are refusing to fall into the trap of negativity. Instead, you confront your problems in a positive and healthy manner, thus giving more strength to your mind and your identity.

Give Up Aimless Wandering

Often times we drift through life without a purpose. There is something to be said for taking the time to find yourself and try new things, but it's also important to learn how to commit. This chapter is all about finding who you are and what it is that you want to do instead of falling into a life of aimless wandering.

How to Find out What You Really Want

There are many things that can interest us, but not be for us. It's really up to you to decide what it is that you do and don't want, but there are a few tricks to coming to this conclusion without too much wasted time and energy.

There are three questions to ask yourself when you're considering settling on a given thing, whether it's a career or a relationship. These questions are (in no particular order):

“Will this benefit me in the long-term?”

“Is this something that I would be proud to be a part of?”

“Do I enjoy doing this?”

Deciding whether something is a benefit in the long-term can be the difference between a lifetime of security and one of constantly bouncing from career to career, relationship to relationship or philosophy to philosophy. If something has a long-term benefit, then it's something worth doing, so long as it doesn't go against your ethical code.

One of the most important, and most overlooked, considerations with life's bigger decisions is whether doing or participating in something would make you proud or not. Many people dislike and berate their jobs. Some are downright ashamed of them. What's important here is not whether other people think what you're doing is something to be proud of, it's what you think. Some of the happiest people in the world do jobs that other people may look down upon, but if it makes you happy and you're proud of what you're doing, who cares what other people think about it?

Do I enjoy doing this? This is a big one. The difference between income and cost of goods is growing greater every day. Because of this, most of the workforce is, in some way, settling for a particular job, even though they'd rather be doing something else. Some people stay in bad or boring relationships because they're used to it, not because they enjoy it. For the sake of your mental health and happiness, it is imperative to find joy in what you're doing. Whether it's in regard to your significant other or your career, learning to love what you do and learning to do what you love is one of the best ways to secure a happy existence in your time on this planet.

Exercise 38:

When you find yourself lacking direction, ask yourself the three important questions:

“Will this benefit me in the long-term?”

“Is this something that I would be proud to be a part of?”

“Do I enjoy doing this?”

If the answer to any one of these questions is no, write down in your journal why you feel compelled to move forward with it. Is it a necessary evil to get by for the time being? Is it something that will eventually put you in a better position in your work or relationship? The important thing to remember is to stay true to your ethics.

If the benefits outweigh the three questions, go ahead with the decision, but if not, write out what going forward in this manner is missing for you. How does it fall short? What else am I looking for?

Use your own advice as to what you are looking for and try to find something that more closely fits in with your goals.

When the right opportunity comes along, grab it immediately. Don't allow fear to hold you back from what you really want to do.

How does this apply to giving up aimless wandering?

When you know what you want, or at least what characteristics you're looking for in a particular field of experience, you have a much better chance of getting it. By doing this simple introspection, you become more certain of who you are and what you want out of life. There's no more reason to wander, you've found what you need.

Creating Life Goals and a Vision Map

What are your dreams? What are your nightmares? What is it that you really want to achieve in your life? What give you meaning? What gives you depression? By answering these questions for yourself, you're already well on your way to accomplishing your goals.

Life goals are finite points that are achievable, ideal and are in line with your dreams, your ethics and desired legacy. Our life goals are as diverse as we are. Only you can adequately make a choice as to what your life goals are, but there are a few things that you can do to help the process along.

Recognize your interests, and what fulfils you the most. Are you most joyful when you are helping the less fortunate? Are you happier when you are creating something artistic? Do you enjoy business and/or contributing to, or developing a company? Is marriage and family your greatest love? Whatever your answers to the above questions are, take them into consideration. This is by no means an exhaustive list of possible questions, but it can give you an idea of what to look for.

Life goals are not a single, enormous thing. They are a bunch of things that we want to accomplish during our time on this planet and their cohesion is what gives our life its meaning. They are important destinations along our larger journey. To that end, it's helpful to draw a map.

Exercise 39:

Write down a life goal in the center of a piece of paper. (a template will be provided after this exercise)

Use a different paper for each one of your life goals.

Starting from the outside and working your way in, list the steps that will be necessary to achieve this goal.

Be as specific as you can, but only include the major steps. If one of these steps requires steps of its own, create a new paper list for this particular goal.

Mark off the steps as you accomplish them.

When you reach a goal, throw a party! Make a big deal about it, because achieving a life's goal is a big deal.

How does this apply to giving up aimless wandering?

By setting life goals and working toward their achievement, there is no reason to wander. We have a clear path to the things that we most want to accomplish and that is, in itself, a pretty phenomenal thing.

Give Up Pretending To Be Someone You're Not

Throughout our lives we have a tendency to take on the attributes, beliefs and even mannerisms of other people. These are usually people for whom we have a modicum of respect. However, by pretending to be someone you're not you're not allowing yourself to be who you are.

When we base our lives, our actions and/or our beliefs off of what works for someone else, how can we ever find out what will work for us and find our own fulfillment? The truth is that we can't. We may find that some things work universally, but we are all different and require different things, beliefs and behaviors for our own lives.

How can we overcome this influence to assimilate into another person's ideal of what is or isn't right for us?

Finding Your True Self

This isn't as easy as it looks on paper. Finding your true self can be a lifelong process, however, its benefits are incredibly worth the effort. To find your true self, you must undergo some real introspection.

What do you like? What don't you like? What goals do you have that are purely your own? What goals are pressed upon you by someone else? Do you feel more comfortable as a wallflower or the life of the party? Do you enjoy things that others think are silly, geeky or unusual? What is it that speaks to you the most?

By beginning to ask yourself these questions, you become willing to investigate the true nature of yourself. This is a huge undertaking, but it's rewarding every step of the way. Let's take a look at an example of what happens when someone lives their life as someone they're not.

Kendall is new in the office, but he always knows just how to fit in. He mimics some of the attributes of the more successful

people in the company and takes their opinions for his own. As time passes, he begins to stop questioning whether these opinions are actually his own, or just things that he's so used to thinking that he doesn't know the difference anymore. Although he gets along well with his colleagues, he is unfulfilled and doesn't know what's missing from his life.

If Kendall would take the time to do some introspection, he could return to a closer version of himself and his lack of fulfillment would be abated. How about what happens when someone takes the time to do the work?

Kim is new in the office. She is congenial and interested in her co-workers, but is first and foremost her own person. She knows who she is and what she wants. People gravitate toward her for her self-awareness and confidence. She gets along well with her colleagues and lives a very fulfilling life.

These are but a couple brief examples to illustrate the difference between a person with self-awareness and a person who lives their life as someone else. The fact of the matter is that the perks that may seem to come from pretending to be someone else are just as achievable by being you. In fact, being yourself is a much more fulfilling endeavor, because your accomplishments, friendships and daily life is something purely of your own creation.

Exercise 40:

In your journal write a list of your most predominant attributes both when you're on your own and when you're around other people.

If you see a discrepancy between these two, investigate the reasons behind these differences.

Detail what you most want out of life and how you can achieve these things by being true to yourself.

The next time someone asks for your opinion, be courteous but honest. If you agree with the other person because you actually agree with them, that's one thing, but agreeing because it's the

more popular decision separates you from your true self and is little better than a lie.

How does this apply to giving up pretending to be someone else?

By finding your true self, you become aware of how you fit into the world at large. With this knowledge, you can learn to be yourself and achieve the goals that are really important to you in a way that doesn't leave a bad taste in your mouth.

Learn to Nourish Your True Self

Once you know who you are, it's important to be good to yourself. This can be done by simply rejoicing in the person that is you. Treat yourself to something nice. Develop your own skills, your mind and your body. Make your existence the best possible place it can be for your own growth, your joy and your goals.

When you accomplish a particularly difficult task, reward yourself. Get something nice, or do something that you've always wanted to do. Save up some money and visit that place that you've always wanted to see. Spend time with friends and family and delight in the way that the real you works with these people to provide beauty and cohesion.

Don't be afraid to try something new. New experiences enrich our lives and give us something to delight in as we go through our lives.

Exercise 41:

Make a list of the things you would like to do to reward yourself, i.e. take a trip to an exotic location, learn a new skill or develop an old one, find something that is unique to you that you can offer to the world or even just to yourself.

Write out the steps necessary to obtain these rewards, i.e. save up money, book a flight, get a hotel; practice your skill, take a class, enlist others to join you.

Write down one thing every day that is particularly great about being you.

How does this apply to giving up pretending to be someone else?

When you enrich your own life and nourish your true self, this true self is strengthened. A byproduct of this type of work is happiness, and (as mentioned much earlier in the book) isn't that the ultimate goal?

Give Up Unhappiness

Here in the final chapter, it's time to go over the heart of the matter. Often times we get so used to being unhappy that it's all we can do to get up in the morning. Unhappiness is like a disease and an addiction rolled into one. It's time for recovery.

Whether it's a specific choice that we made along the way or, much more commonly, something that we've just accepted, unhappiness is something from which we can learn and to which we should work to dismantle. What untruths have you accepted about yourself? Do you believe that you're destined to never find happiness, or just be plain miserable for the rest of your life? Why?

It feels easier to give up and let unhappiness reign, but in truth, this path is much more difficult as it's constantly beset by misery and tribulation. When we're happy, we're optimistic and ready to tackle everything that may stand in our way. When we're unhappy, even the smallest things can bring us down farther.

As with anything, the thing that is required is action. So for the final exercise, we'll explore ways to celebrate your happiness and kick unhappiness out of your life.

Exercise 42:

Create a happiness blog. In this blog, include all of the things about yourself, your loved ones and life in general that contribute to what makes you happy. Put it out there, celebrate it!

Commit yourself to twenty-one days of happiness. Take pictures of your smiling face, the fun things that you do and the people who enhance your life. During this time, try new and exciting things. Life is too short to be bored, and there's no excuse for it. Get out there and find your bliss.

Be spontaneous. Dance in the rain, sing when you're alone or with others, make every day a new adventure.

Make up your own lists and exercises. Put down what you would like to do and what would help you specifically the most to overcome your unhappiness and move toward a more fulfilling, richer life.

Spend time with your friends and do something new together. Take a class or go skydiving. The possibilities are endless, and when we share these things with other people, our bonds are strengthened and everyone is happier for the effort.

How does this apply to giving up unhappiness?

Happiness is the cure to all maladies. Life may throw you a curveball; it may even throw you more than your fair share, but the way in which you approach your life decides whether you're simply coping, or if you are truly happy. Even if things go wrong, if you can maintain your positive outlook and your joy, you will never truly fail. Life becomes a series of lessons and a joyful experience of learning them.

Maybe we can't be happy 100% of the time, but we could all do with coming as close to this ideal as possible.

Conclusion

I hope that you have found this journey as enriching and delightful to read and to take as I have writing it. By removing the dross of your life and accepting the opportunity for joy and fulfillment, we can all lead a more pleasant, productive and pure existence.

None of the content of this book is intended, nor should it be used in place of the advice of doctors, therapists or other wellness professionals. The principles in this book can very profoundly shape your life for the better, but it's important to do what is best for you in your own particular situation.

It has been my pleasure to write this book and I hope that you have found many things within its pages to give you strength, guidance and maybe even a laugh or two. There is a better life out there for all of us. I think it's about time that we take hold of it. By bettering our own lives, we better society. By giving to others, we give back to ourselves.

I wish you the very best in your life. Happiness is truly the goal and I sincerely hope that you can find it. Thank you for reading.

Alvin Huang & Chris D'Cruz

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